Only 20, Trevor Bayne Wins the Daytona 500

BY LARS ANDERSON
P. 50

Sports Illustrated

FEBRUARY 28, 2011 | SI.COM

THE BOYS OF SPRING

ONLY 21, FREDDIE FREEMAN AND JASON HEYWARD ARE THE CORNERSTONES OF ATLANTA'S BRAVE NEW WORLD

BY BEN REITER

P. 34

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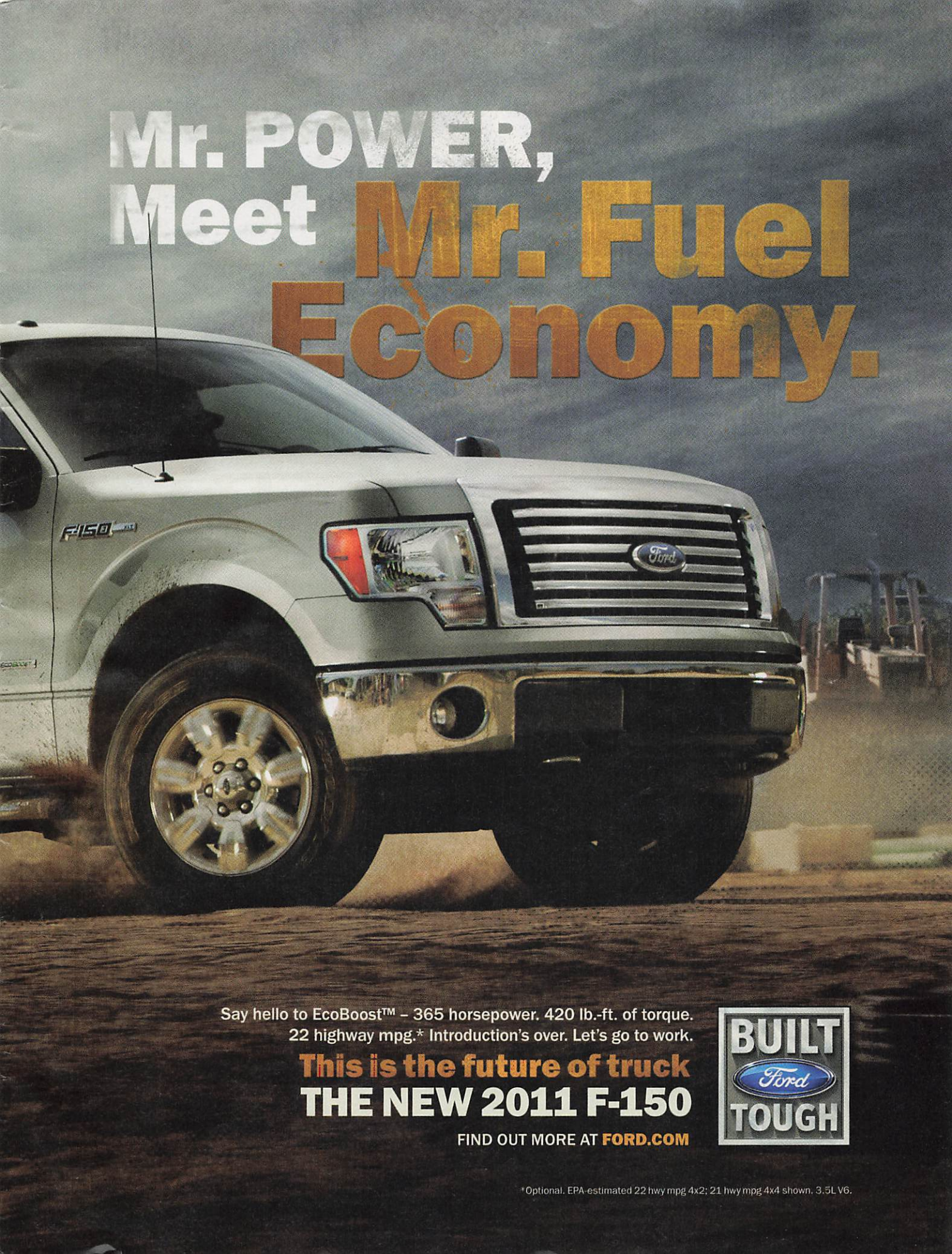

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Sports Illustrated
February 28, 2011
Volume 114, No. 9

Lineup

BOYS OF SPRING: 2011 ROOKIES TO WATCH

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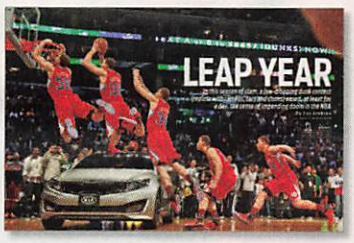
IMMEDIATE IMPACT

In a pool of strong rookies, one stands out: Braves first baseman Freddie Freeman, whose big bat might remind you of last year's phenom **By Ben Reiter**



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Blake Griffin's jaw-dropping All-Star dunkfest eased, at least for a day, the sense of impending labor doom in the NBA **By Lee Jenkins**

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DAYTONA 500

In his second start, Trevor Bayne survived a wreck-filled race and outran his elders to become, at 20, the youngest Daytona winner in history **By Lars Anderson**

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SAN DIEGO STATE

The unprecedented success of the sixth-ranked Aztecs has whipped their once-feeble fan base into a frenzy. And it's not even March yet **By Kelli Anderson**

ON THE COVER Photograph by Al Tielemans

DARREN CARROLL (DANTON)

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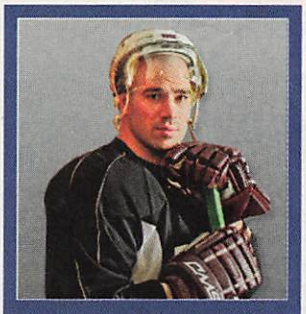

"I'M GLAD I WENT TO PRISON"

FORMER NHL PLAYER MIKE DANTON IS PIECING HIS LIFE BACK TOGETHER

By L. Jon Wertheim

page 60

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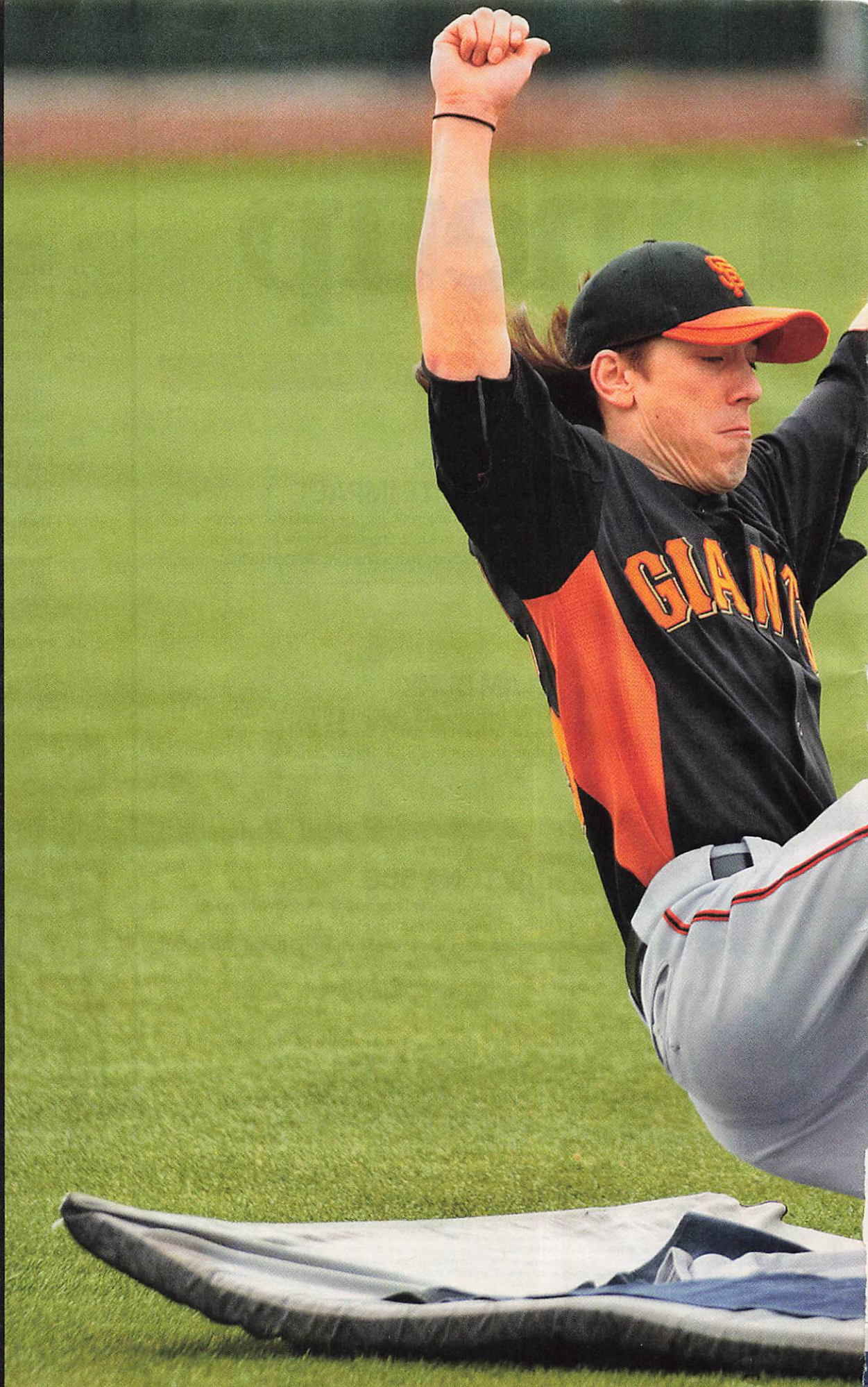


LEADING OFF

SPRING IN HIS STEP

Giants ace Tim Lincecum threw himself into a sliding drill at his team's training facility in Scottsdale, Ariz., last Friday. The Freak, fresh off a 16–10 season with 231 strikeouts and a World Series ring, joined the hundreds of other pitchers, catchers and rookies who reported to camp last week, several of whom have the look of franchise-changers (page 34).

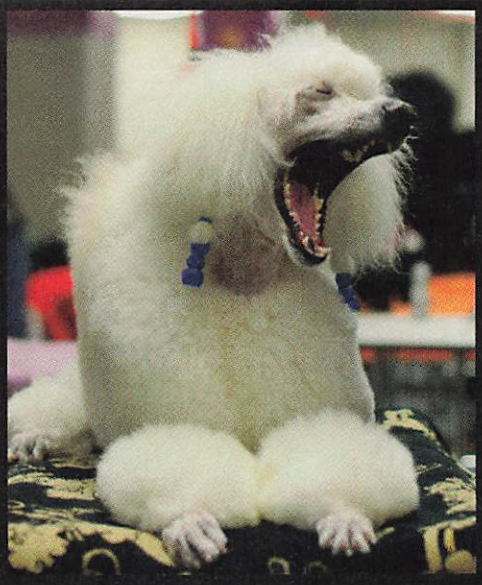
Photograph by **Jed Jacobsohn**

LEADING OFF

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Joe Simpson of the London Wasps (far right) passed the ball out of a scrum during an Aviva Premiership (English first division) rugby match against the Leicester Tigers in Leicester last Saturday. The Tigers, who led the 12-team league through Sunday, defeated the eighth-place Wasps 21–12.

Photograph by **David Rogers/ Getty Images**



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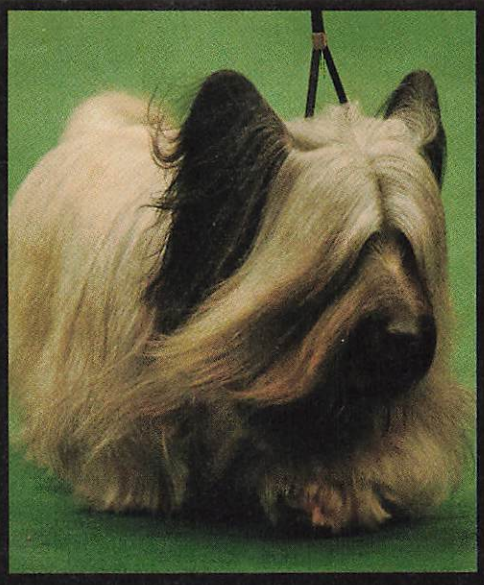
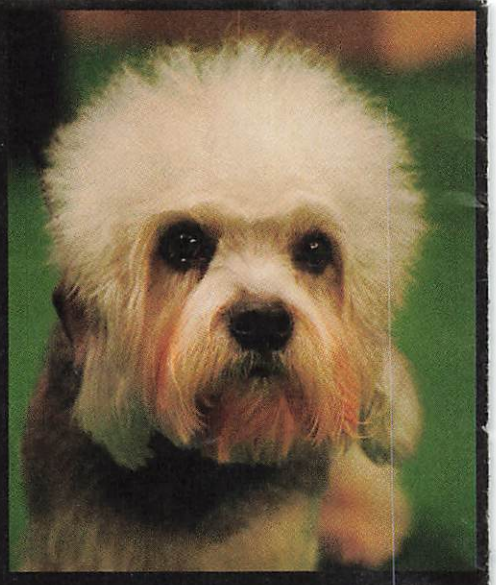
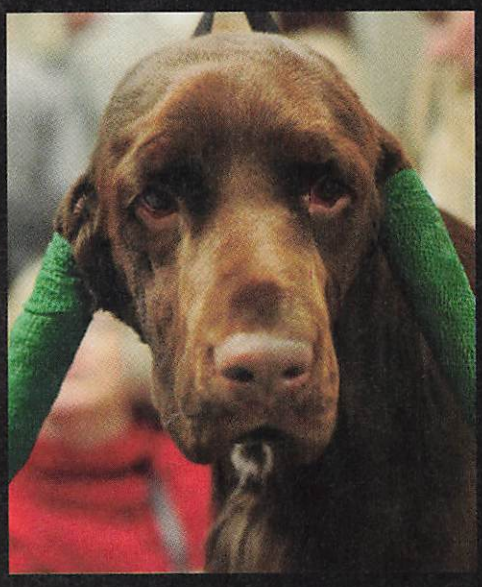


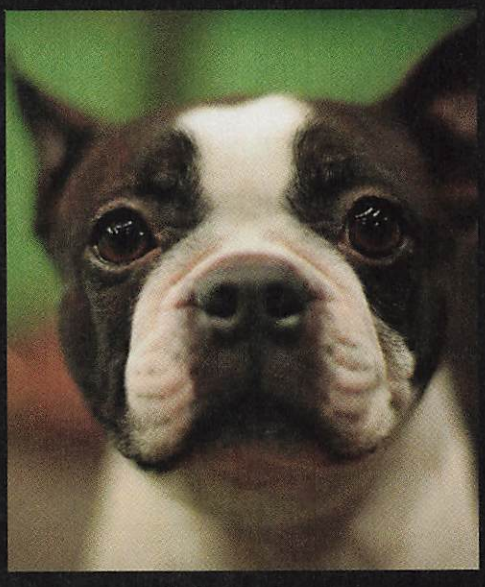
Buddy SKYE TERRIER



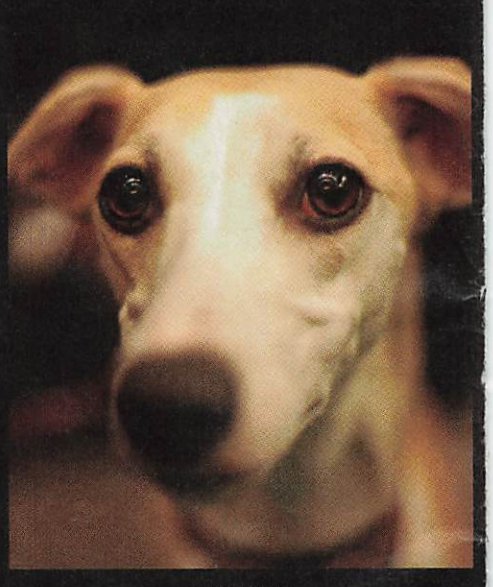
Disher DANDIE DINMONT TERRIER



Spencer FIELD SPANIEL



Gertie BOSTON TERRIER



Kate WHIPPET

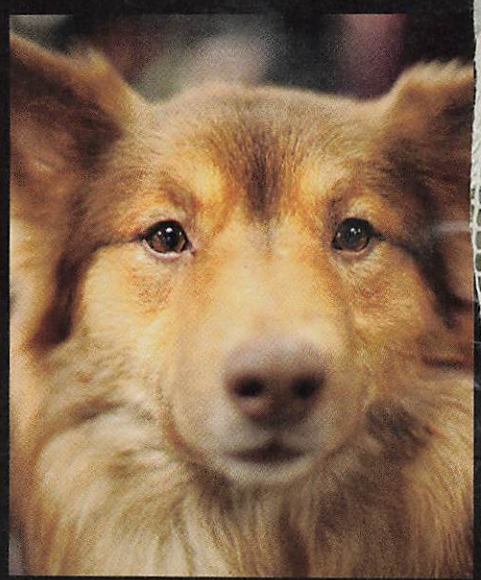
LEADING OFF

WONDER BRED

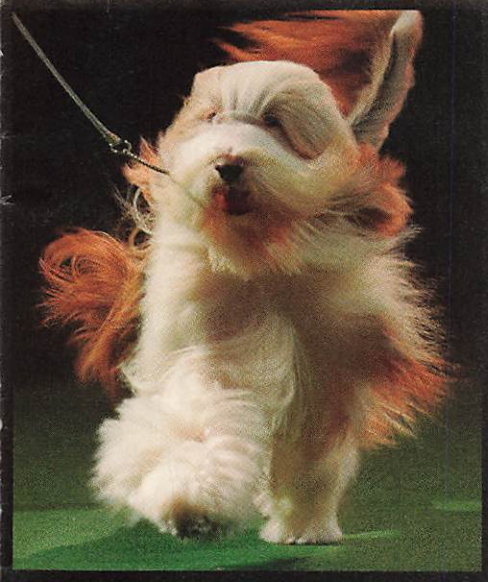
More than 2,500 champions, grand champions and other top dogs, from the luxuriantly maned to the almost hairless, gathered in New York City's Madison Square Garden on Feb. 14–15 to compete in the 135th Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show. Eighty-six of them were named best in breed, and a 5-year-old bitch nicknamed Hickory, reared in Flint Hill, Va., became the first Scottish deerhound to win best-in-show at Westminster.

Photographs by **Kristyn D. Ulanday**

Ciacho POLISH LOWLAND SHEEPDOG



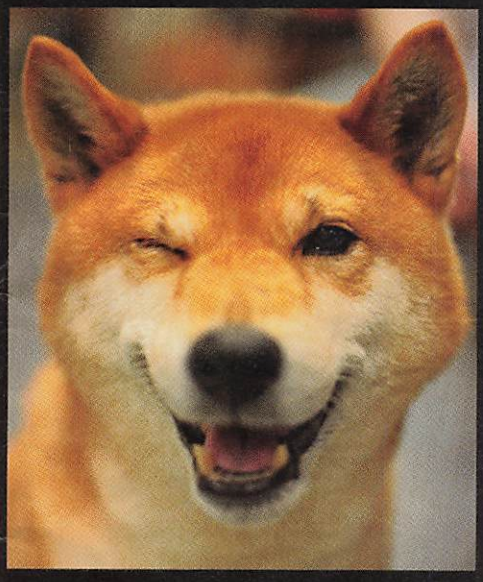
Kaffi ICELANDIC SHEEPDOG



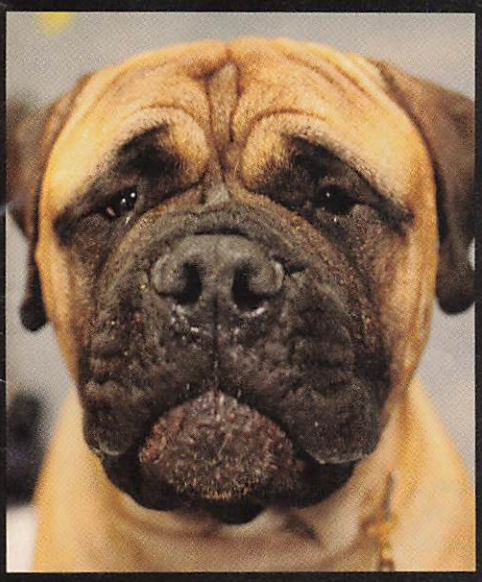
Mister Baggins BEARDED COLLIE

Morgan YORKSHIRE TERRIER

Major KOMONDOR



Mr. Miyagi SHIBA INU



Bru BULLMASTIFF

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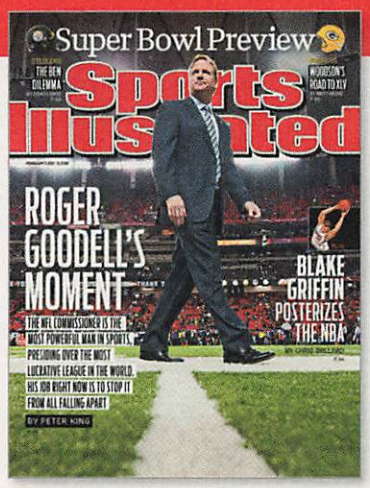
Roger Goodell has certainly made an impact on the NFL. I applaud him for his tough stance on players' safety and discipline, and for the professionalism he expects personnel to display at all levels. If he can settle the labor dispute without a lockout, he will be a genius.

Ron Caputo, Chandler, Ariz.


Super Bowl Preview
Sports Illustrated
ROGER GOODELL'S MOMENT
THE NFL COMMISSIONER IS THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN SPORTS, PRESIDING OVER THE MOST LUCRATIVE LEAGUE IN THE WORLD. HIS JOB RIGHT NOW IS TO STOP IT FROM ALL FALLING APART
BY PETER KING
BLAKE GRIFFIN POSTERIZES THE NBA

For reprints of SI covers visit SIcovers.com

Peter King's article on Roger Goodell (*The Man of the Hour*, Feb. 7) caught me completely off guard. I now have a significantly different outlook on Goodell's position as NFL commissioner, a job that is both glamorous and thankless. The contrast between Goodell as stern gatekeeper and passionate head of state is quite revealing. While I don't agree with many of the rules he has put in place that have taken the edge off the game, at least I now know that there is a method to his madness.

Mark S. McKinney
Santa Ynez, Calif.

Your article showed exactly why the owners feel Goodell is the right man to resolve the NFL's issues. However, the author failed to mention anything about players who often don't see eye to eye with the commissioner. For example, center Jeff Saturday ended a meeting with Goodell in the Colts' locker room last August because Goodell was being berated by the players. It makes you wonder how well the NFL can function if the employees don't respect the boss.

Dylan Snyder
San Rafael, Calif.

Odd Man In

Your article on Brian Wilson (*Three Quarters Nuts*, Feb. 7) illustrates that he is baseball's most underrated closer. Although Wilson saved more games than either Mariano Rivera or Billy Wagner last year, his talent has been overshadowed by Rivera's and Wagner's ability to still save games despite their age, and by talk of their potential places in the Hall of Fame.

Alex Schiffer
Westfield, N.J.

Wilson might give a crazy first impression, but critics should realize that his eccentricities simply highlight his unique character. His is not the desire for attention that so often plagues other athletes. Besides, his talent clearly complements his quirkiness, as he is an integral fixture on a dominant pitching staff.

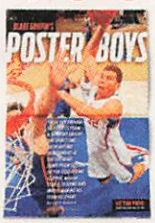
Neil Jariwalla
San Jose

Changed Man?

Your article on Ben Roethlisberger (*Chasten the Dream*, Feb. 7) focused on the degree to which the Steelers and their fans have forgiven him for his egregious misconduct. I wonder, however, about the people who suffered firsthand from his boorish behavior. Has Roethlisberger apologized to them and sought to make amends for how he mistreated them? That would be the best evidence that his apparent change of heart is real.

Jay Misenheimer
Puyallup, Wash.

Flying High



I thoroughly enjoyed your article on Blake Griffin (*Poster Boys*, Feb. 7). He continues to impress basketball fans not only with his monstrous slams but also with his hustle and dedication on the court. He's bringing the Clippers back from basketball purgatory and finally making the team interesting to follow.

Charlie Beyerl
Hingham, Mass.

I wanted to thank Chris Ballard for the excellent profile of Griffin. For far too long the Clippers have played second fiddle to the Lakers. With Griffin's help that's about to change.

Matt Engel, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

There's no denying that Griffin is a unique specimen and an amazing dunker. However, the photo of his dunk on the Knicks' Danilo Gallinari shows a blatant offensive foul: Griffin grabs Gallinari's arm as he attempts the throw-down.

Tim Josephs
Asheville, N.C.

Is it by pure chance that your photograph of Griffin dunking over Zack Novak makes Griffin look like he's wearing a Superman cape?

Dave Ayrault, Pointe Park, Mich.

Tweetin' It Up

I want to thank Joe Posnanski for his not-so-subtle commentary on the mundane tweets of famous athletes (POINT AFTER, Feb. 7). The thought that anyone could be moved by the dietary choices of John Daly or Doyle Brunson left me no choice but to LOL.

Brian Ogolsky, Towson, Md.

Your brilliant column on athletes and Twitter only confirmed what I already suspected: The vast majority of tweets are both narcissistic and inane.

Pat Crowley
Lexington, Mass.

I do not use Twitter or read blogs, because I feel that most of their authors are saying nothing worthwhile. Still, there are times when I worry that I might be missing out on something. Thankfully, your column has confirmed my original thesis.

Alan E. Krause
Oak Park, Ill.

BOB ROSATO (COVER)

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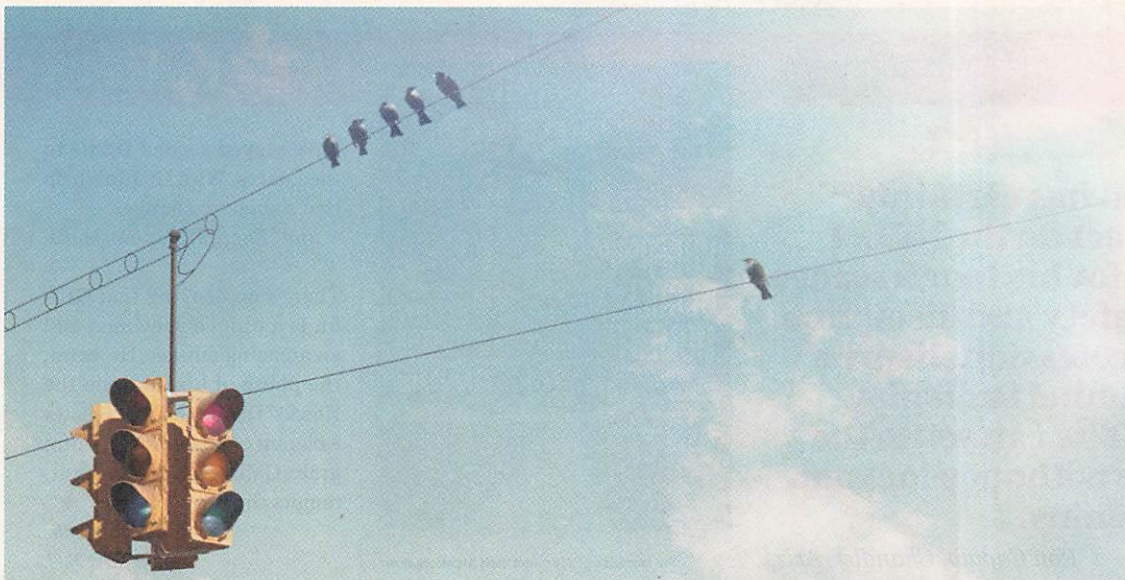

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Edited by
RICHARD O'BRIEN
AND ADAM DUERSON

Scorecard

All Together at Toomer's Corner

The attack on Auburn's oaks brings out the love in college rivals | BY AUSTIN MURPHY

The crime had a time-delayed effect, not unlike the toxin used in its commission. People reacted immediately and viscerally to the news last week that two majestic, 130-year-old oaks at Toomer's Corner in Auburn, Ala., had been poisoned. Yet it took more time—hours, if not days—for the mind to absorb the full impact of the cruel act.

Those oaks, as most everyone in the South learns by elementary school, are festooned with bathroom tissue after Tigers football victories. There was a time when I found the "rolling" of Toomer's Corner a bit shopworn and overexposed—like the azaleas at the Masters and Chris Berman's Swami shtick.

I felt that way until I experienced the spectacle in person, following Auburn's upset of Florida at Jordan-Hare Stadium in 2006. Walking through those white filaments, exchanging polite greetings with perfect strangers, was surreal and wonderful. As in, full of wonder. I felt like I was inside a snow globe. It was easy to see, that night, why this had become one of the most beloved traditions in a sport that derives much of its vast appeal from its traditions.

So the poisoner may have done more than harm two trees. He has struck a blow at the root of college football itself. I don't mean to overstate the gravity of this situation. No one has been injured. Physically. But for the purposes of inflicting anguish on a large number of people, he could not have picked a better target.

Charged in the case is Harvey Updyke, a 62-year-old former Texas state trooper from Dadeville, Ala., who was identified as "Al from Dadeville" when he called the highly popular, Birmingham-based Paul Finebaum radio show on Jan. 27 and said on the air, "The weekend after the Iron Bowl [on Nov. 26], I went to Auburn, Alabama . . . and I poisoned the two Toomer's trees."

With this wanton act the poisoner struck a blow at the ROOT OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL.

Asked by Finebaum if the trees died, he said, "They're not dead yet, but they will die." Updyke, who was charged with first degree criminal mischief and released last Friday on $50,000 bond, could serve between one and 10 years in prison if convicted. He has acknowledged making the statements on the radio, but he has denied that he actually poisoned the trees.

On Finebaum's show Updyke said he used Spike 80DF. It is an herbicide that is normally used to clear brush and trees and stays in the soil for three to five years, killing plants by "interfering with photosynthesis," says Scott Enebak, a professor of forest pathology at Auburn. The poison is absorbed through the roots and causes leaves to turn brown and dry up shortly after they come out in the spring, according to Enebak.

"It hurts," he says. "I drove by that corner yesterday, and it brought tears to my eyes. People have proposed marriage under those trees; they've had some of their happiest moments [in the shade of those oaks]. And they may not make it."

One of Enebak's colleagues, associate professor Scott McElroy, was more blunt: "Worst case scenario, the trees will die," he blogged. "Best case scenario, the trees will be disfigured to the point they have to be removed."

This one wanton act has, paradoxically, ushered in an era of unprecedented civility and graciousness between Auburn and its SEC rivals. A sampling of Facebook postings:

I'm a Razorback Fan, but we

ILLUSTRATION BY DARROW

here in Hog Country are ALL pulling for you guys and your beautiful trees. —Sarah Nicholson

We are an LSU family and are truly saddened to see someone attack such a tradition. . . . Geaux SEC! —Sarah Link Hitchcock

I am a Tennessee fan to the core, but I cannot even believe how MEAN this guy was to you. —Taryn Hendrix Painter.

More remarkable was the appearance of a Facebook page called Tide for Toomer's, which since Feb. 17 has amassed 57,000 fans and raised more than $36,000 to try to save the oaks. While it has not escaped their notice that Updyke signed off Finebaum's show with the words "Roll damn Tide," most Auburn fans acknowledge that he doesn't represent the University of Alabama (which he never attended, Tide officials hastened to point out).

Updyke's alleged crime seems an extreme example of the intense partisanship pervading college athletics in general and SEC football in particular. The expression of that animosity straddles the line between passion and pathology. I remember sitting in a club in Columbus on the eve of the 2006 Ohio State–Michigan game, watching a show by a punk band called the Dead Schembechlers. (Out of respect for former Wolverines coach Bo Schembechler, who had died *that morning*, they soon renamed themselves the Bastard Sons of Woody.)

Between such half-screamed numbers as *Bomb Ann Arbor Now*; *Wide Left: The Ballad of Mike Lantry;* and *I Wipe My A-- with Wolverine Fur*, lead singer Bo Biafra (not his real name) posed a question I found rather profound: "Who ever thought we would all love to hate so much?"

The trees that were poisoned are probably doomed. Yet their poisoner's most lasting legacy may be that he ended up turning down the hate. □

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Get complete spring football coverage from Stewart Mandel and Andy Staples at **SI.com/cfb**

Who's Hot Who's Not

COYOTES HOWL
Phoenix has won seven in a row and sits atop the Pacific Division. Alas, someone needs to alert Phoenicians. With the team 30th in attendance, many are missing out on goalie Ilya Bryzgalov *(right)*, who has five shutouts this season and has stopped 95% of the shots he's faced in the streak.

AVALANCHE FOUL
Look out below! After cruising along above .500, Colorado has dropped 10 straight. During their longest winless streak since moving to Denver in 1994, the Avs have been outscored 42–14 and last week traded away promising forward Chris Stewart to St. Louis.

FARIED TALE
Move over, Tim Duncan. Morehead State center Kenneth Faried broke the ex–Demon Deacon's 15-year-old D-I rebounding record by pulling down career board number 1,571 as the hot Eagles (21–8) beat Indiana State 71–65. Said Faried, "I can't explain how excited I am."

CHELSEA FAIL
What's wrong in West London? Last year's EPL and FA Cup trophy-winners have won just six of their last 19 games; Pricey new striker Fernando Torres (£50M, *left*) is scoreless in two tilts in blue; and Chelsea risks missing the Champions League for the first time since 2004.

BLAZERS BLAZING
Portland quietly has the fifth-best record in the West (32–24) and six straight wins coming out of the All-Star break thanks to LaMarcus Aldridge *(right)* and his 27.9 ppg and 9.1 rpg over the last 10 games. More good news: Brandon Roy aims to return from a knee injury this week.

LAKERS FLAKING
A drubbing at Charlotte and a 104–99 defeat at lowly Cleveland had L.A. limping into hosting duties at the All-Star Game, where home fans mercilessly booed rival players. Kobe's MVP in that game was sweet, but as Amar'e Stoudemire pointed out, "He was not passing the ball at all."

NEW JERSEY: MELLOW
Don't rush these Devils. After spending most of the season chilling in the NHL basement they've matched the best 18-game tear in team history, taking 32 points. Credit much of their return to the playoff hunt to Ilya Kovalchuk *(right)*, who has six goals in seven games.

***ANY* NEW JERSEY FOR 'MELO**
And you thought *The Decision* was overwrought? The Nuggets' forward's seeming indecisiveness is making LeBron's off-season ESPN special feel like must-see TV. Tick, tock, it's time to pick a team. New Jersey? New York? Denver? Choose already.

SI PLAYERS NBA POLL

WHO HAS THE BEST FASHION SENSE OFF THE COURT?

Dwyane Wade, Heat G	**29%**
Kobe Bryant, Lakers G	13%
LeBron James, Heat F	11%
Chris Paul, Hornets G	5%
Carmelo Anthony, Nuggets F	4%

FAST FACTS The Heat had twice as many fashion plates named (six) as any other team; the Bucks and the Thunder (three each) were second. . . . The top five vote-getters started in Sunday's All-Star Game. . . . The Hawks' Zaza Pachulia, with 2% of the votes, was the only center—and the only non-African-American—in the top 10. . . . Each of the three leading vote-getters has been on a *GQ* cover at least once; Bryant has appeared on three.

Based on 137 NBA players who responded to SI's survey

FREDERICK BREEDON/GETTY IMAGES (BRYZGALOV); LAURENCE GRIFFITHS/GETTY IMAGES (TORRES); JORDAN JOHNSON/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (ALDRIDGE); ED MULHOLLAND/US PRESSWIRE (KOVALCHUCK); KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/GETTY IMAGES (ANTHONY); NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (WADE)

Ballot Blues

No Reggie Miller? The hoops hall's nominating process needs a tweak

I have been a Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame voter in the past, but let me clearly state that I was not one of those who this year left off the ballot one Reggie Miller, a two guard who will go down as one of the best three-point shooters in NBA history, a clutch performer who led a moribund franchise (the Pacers) to prominence and a man whose playoff duels with the Knicks provided enduring Madison Square Garden memories.

But I may have an answer, albeit an unsatisfactory one, as to what happened with Miller and, just as significant, to another of the spurned, Don Nelson, who is merely the NBA's alltime winningest coach and a celebrated innovator (Nellie Ball).

GIVE HIM A SHOT Miller's three-point wizardry and clutch play make him a deserving candidate.

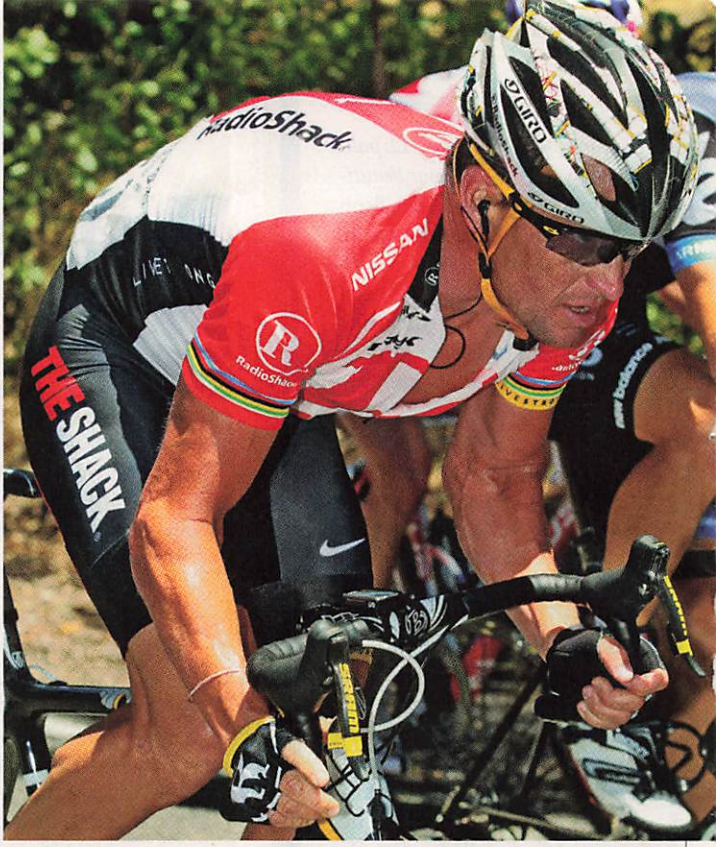
As a voter you are told that the Hall should not be a popularity contest, reminded that the roots of the game should be recognized, schooled not to forget about the women's game. So, taking this year as an example, you nominate Stanford women's coach Tara VanDerveer (817 wins, two NCAA titles) and triangle-offense pioneer Tex Winter, and by the time you've put on rebounding king Dennis Rodman and four-time NBA champion Jamaal Wilkes . . . well, you can't nominate everybody!

So you start to split hairs. Reggie wasn't a good enough defender and was a one-position guy; Nellie never won a ring. Next thing you know, you've overthought the process, providing, say, Teresa Edwards and Herb Magee a chance to get in the Hall of Fame before Miller and Nelson. And that's no slight on Edwards, a five-time Olympian, or Magee, who has won 921 games at Division II Philadelphia University.

I propose a revolving Super Committee to address omissions such as Miller and Nelson. After the nominations a select group (Magic Johnson? Larry Bird? Mike Krzyzewski?) is asked to scour the list. This year the question before them would've been: Will we look like a bunch of idiots if we leave off Reggie and Nellie? We know what their answer would have been. *—Jack McCallum*

SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Two East Calgary men were arrested last week after they allegedly got drunk, broke into an ice arena and stole a Zamboni, intending to use it to push their car out of the snow.



For the Record

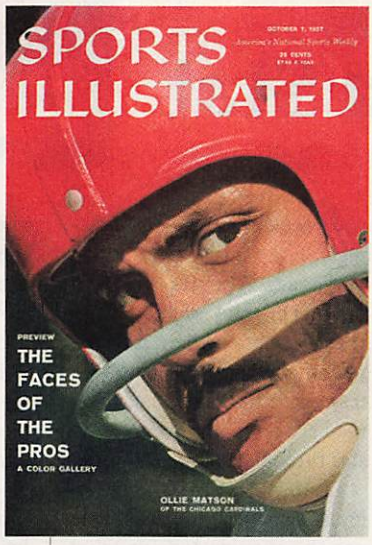
Retired From competitive cycling for the second time in five years, seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong, 39. After initially retiring in 2005, Armstrong returned to the sport two years ago to raise cancer awareness. His own recovery from the disease is well-chronicled: a 1996 diagnosis of stage three testicular cancer (which had spread to his brain, lungs and abdomen), followed by a remarkable comeback in '98 and then the first of his seven straight Tour titles a year later. In his final seasons Armstrong lacked his former dominance, finishing third in the Tour in 2009 and 23rd last year. (Meanwhile federal authorities are continuing their nine-month-old investigation into whether he was involved in performance-enhancing-drug use while riding for the U.S. Postal team from 1999 to 2004—an allegation he has consistently denied.) On Feb. 16, having placed 65th in his most recent race, in Australia *(above)*, Armstrong called it quits again. "Never say never," he said when asked if he might return, adding, "Just kidding."

Died At age 50 from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the chest, four-time Pro Bowl safety Dave Duerson. The former Notre Dame All-America, who won Super Bowls with the 1985 Bears and the '90 Giants, had struggled in recent years. In 2005 he was charged in a domestic dispute, which led to his divorce and to his resignation as a Notre Dame trustee. He soon after foreclosed on a home and lost a Wisconsin food company that he had started. In text messages to family members before he killed himself, Duerson asked that his brain be examined for signs of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a degenerative brain disease linked to depression and often associated with contact sports.

Withdrew From Iowa's high school wrestling tournament rather than compete against a female, 16-year-old Joel

MARK GUNTER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (ARMSTRONG); MANNY MILLAN (MILLER)

Northrup. A homeschooled sophomore who had a 35–4 record wrestling for Linn-Mar High, and whose Pentecostal beliefs, his pastor said, forbid him from touching females in a "familiar way," Northrup drew Cedar Falls freshman Cassy Herkelman (20–13), one of the first two girls ever to compete in the tournament, as his first-round opponent in the 112-pound class last Thursday. Northrup defaulted, adding in a statement that "wrestling is a combat sport and it can get violent at times." Herkelman's win, the first for an Iowa girl, advanced her to the quarterfinals, where she lost 5–1 on Friday. The other first-time female, Megan Black of Ottumwa, was eliminated on Thursday.



Died At age 80 of respiratory failure, former running back Ollie Matson, who is in both the college and pro football halls of fame and who twice won medals in the Olympics. At the University of San Francisco, Matson became a face of the civil rights movement in 1951, a season in which he led the nation in rushing yet finished ninth in Heisman voting while his undefeated Dons—who started two African-Americans—were passed over for bowls. A year later he won a bronze medal in the 400 meters and a silver in the 4×400 relay at the Helsinki Olympics. That summer Matson *(above)* also kicked off a stellar NFL career with the Chicago Cardinals, for whom he was co–Rookie of the Year. In 14 seasons with four teams (including the Rams, who famously traded nine players for him in '59), Matson gained 12,799 all-purpose yards, scored 73 touchdowns and was an All-Pro seven times.

Retired From baseball after a one-year absence from the game, 42-year-old outfielder Gary Sheffield, whose 509 career home runs rank 24th all time (and placed him fifth among active players). The nephew of former Mets pitcher Dwight Gooden, with whom he was raised in the Belmont Heights projects near Tampa and from whom he learned to hit a fastball, Sheffield played for eight teams in 22 seasons and was known almost as much for his brash behavior as his skill at the plate. He made a run at the Triple Crown with the Padres in 1992 (he fell two home runs and nine RBIs short) and helped the Marlins to the World Series title in '97. His tenures with the Brewers, Dodgers and Yankees ended poorly, however, with him accusing each team of racism or of having spent their money ineptly. With the Mets in April 2009, his final season, Sheffield became just the third player (after Ty Cobb and Rusty Staub) to homer before age 20 and after age 40.

Died In an explosion from a suicide bombing while he was returning from a training session, Abdi Salaan Mohamed Ali, one of Somalia's up-and-coming soccer stars. A recent addition to the national under-20 squad, Ali was walking home with teammates after an early Monday practice at a Somali police academy when, according to a bystander, there were two explosions. (Somali players Mahmoud Amin Mohamed and Siid Ali Mohamed Xiis were also wounded in the attack.) Afterward, FIFA president Sepp Blatter offered his condolences in a statement to friends and family. Over the past four years Somalia has lost more than a dozen soccer players and officials to violence during its ongoing civil war.

JOHN G. ZIMMERMAN (MATSON); LARRY BUSACCA/GETTY IMAGES (PROKHOROV)

THEY SAID IT

Mikhail Prokhorov
New Nets owner, on his pitch meeting at a Los Angeles restaurant last Saturday with Nuggets forward Carmelo Anthony:

"No words, just live music, excellent atmosphere. We looked into each other's eyes. Just real man talk."

Go Figure

$592 million
Revenue earned last season by Real Madrid, the most ever by a pro sports team, according to Deloitte LLP. The Yankees, at $441 million, were the most lucrative nonsoccer team.

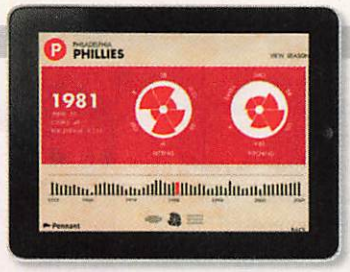
0 for 4
Plate performance by Florida International's Garrett Wittels in a season-opening loss to Southeastern Louisiana last Friday, snapping his hitting streak at 56 games, two short of Robin Ventura's D-I mark, set in 1987.

103
Three-pointers attempted—with eight made—by West Burlington (Iowa) High in its 109–25 loss to Danville on Feb. 12, a new national record.

8
"Heyward tents" erected by the Braves at their training facility in Florida to protect team executives' cars from the far-reaching homers of Jason Heyward.

3 of 11
Shooting by Justin Bieber in last Saturday's NBA All-Star Celebrity Game, enough to earn him MVP, which was decided by text message voting.

29, 12, 10
Points, rebounds and assists in Sunday's All-Star Game by LeBron James, the second player, after Michael Jordan in 1997, to triple double in that game.

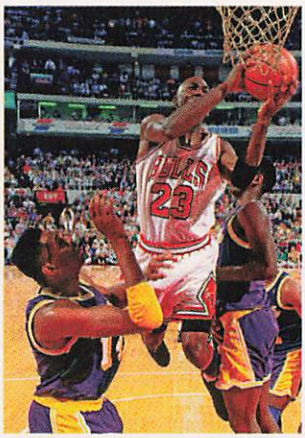


Spot a Shot, App a Stat

Two innovations give fans fresh looks at sporting history

As Watson, the IBM computer that dominated on *Jeopardy*, proved, it's not accessing the Web's ocean of data that counts most, but sorting it. The same is true for fans seeking sports info, and now they have help from two new sources: Pennant, an iPad app that bears a trove of MLB history, and an interactive online chart, from Hoopism.com, of the greatest NBA shots.

Pennant is the creation of Steve Varga, who began work on the app a year ago—before the iPad's release—as his master's thesis at Parsons design school in New York City. (His app, out this month, sells for $4.99.) Culling data from the online repositories Retrosheet and Baseball DataBank, Pennant lets users click, sort and scroll through six decades of data ranging from play-by-play to lineups to standings. Statistics "can be esoteric," Varga says. "The idea was to put the data in people's hands." Thus the presentation is key: intricate yet intuitive layers of color-coded, team-specific bars and easy-to-read charts that make it fun to sort through a maze of stats.



IT'S TOUCH AND GO Hoopism (above) puts Jordan's spectacular scoop on the map, while Pennant (top) goes deep.

Brothers Jason and Matt Bailey, the cocreators of Hoopism got the inspiration for what they termed their "Valentine's Day gift for hoops fans" from a poster in a New Hampshire bar documenting famous shots in Celtics history. They expanded the scope to the whole NBA, then added streaming video. They also sought suggestions from basketball bloggers to plot 65 classic buckets—from Jerry West's 1970 Finals heave to Michael Jordan's shifting Finals layup in '91—on a full-court layout. Clicking a dot opens a YouTube clip. Says Matt, "One of the cool comments that came back was that real fans can look at the court and know what the video's gonna be."

Both new ventures stem from an uncommon intersection of passions. "We're sports nerds," explains Jason Bailey, "but I'm also a design nerd and Matt's a programmer nerd." The results have resonated beyond the limited crossover between those communities: Hoopism.com went from drawing 50,000 visitors in three months to attracting a quarter million in the past three weeks, while Varga's app has garnered ink from *Wired* and *Gizmodo*. But those numbers aren't what drive the three designers. Says Varga, echoing the Baileys, "The main reason I create projects is because it's something I want to use." —*Dan Greene*

Greatness, Unrecognized

Athletes tend to have a strong sense of self and often expect others to share it. Latest example: Miguel Cabrera. Stopped for a suspected DUI in Fort Pierce, Fla., on Feb. 16, police say that the Tigers first baseman drank from a bottle of Scotch, refused a Breathalyzer and demanded of officers, "Do you know who I am?" That did not get Cabrera (who has not commented) off the hook—he spent the night in jail and now awaits a court date on DUI and resisting arrest charges—but it did put him in a not-so-exclusive club. Herewith, some fellow DYKWIA Hall of Famers:

Ozzie Canseco A 1995 dispute with a Florida moving company over a $1,111 bill led to the lesser-known Canseco twin's DYKWIA moment. The movers still didn't recognize him, so Ozzie shot out four tires on the van as the movers scurried for cover. He later pleaded guilty to aggravated assault and felony mischief charges.

Tiger Woods In '96, months before his first Masters win, the 20-year-old was spotted playing blackjack by an Iowa riverboat casino employee. Asked for I.D., Woods teed up a DYKWIA, to which the employee replied: "I don't care if you're the Lion King."

Michael Irvin The HOF receiver celebrated his 30th birthday in '96 with friends, dancers and 10 grams of cocaine. Neither his DYKWIA nor his Super Bowl win a month earlier was enough to persuade Dallas police to let him off the hook. Irvin pleaded no contest, paid a $10,000 fine and served four years probation.

Bill Walsh The former 49ers coach was allegedly spotted peeking at a face-down card in a blackjack game at a Nevada casino in '98 and was scolded by a bystander. Walsh's DYKWIA earned him a punch in the mouth from the accuser, whose story Walsh refuted.

Qyntel Woods The Blazers forward didn't ask; he showed. Because his license had been revoked, Woods got creative in 2003 when, after being pulled over for speeding, he provided as I.D. two credit cards—and his trading card. Woods later pleaded no contest to driving under the influence and possession of pot.

Marshawn Lynch The NFL back dropped a DYKWIA in '10 after he allegedly took $20 from a woman who was paying her bar tab. Said Lynch, "There's going to be consequences." And there were. The $20 was returned after the woman's husband, a police sergeant, filed a report. —*Brian Hendrickson and Matthew Kitchen*

WWW.PENNANT.CC (PENNANT DIAGRAM); ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (JORDAN); HOOPISM.COM (COURT DIAGRAM); OTTO GREULE/GETTY IMAGES (CANSECO); JACQUELINE DUVOISIN (TIGER WOODS); LINDA KAYE/AP (IRVIN); JOHN G. MABANGLO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (WALSH); TOM HAUCK/ICON SMI (QYNTEL WOODS); TOM DIPACE (LYNCH)

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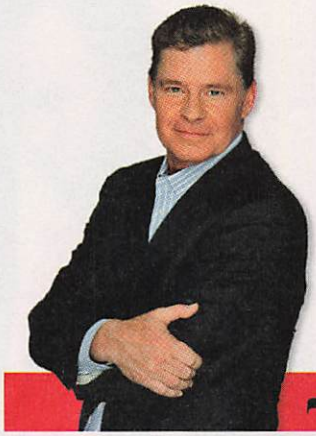


Just My Type

By Dan Patrick

The Interview

Phil Jackson ASPIRING COUCH POTATO

The 11-time NBA champion as a coach—he also won two as a player—has said this will be his final season on the sideline with the Lakers.

Dan Patrick: *When was the last time you had a moment like Jerry Sloan's and wanted to walk away midseason?*

Phil Jackson: That mood attacks you at times as a coach. You keep beating your head against the wall and keep emphasizing the same message, and it doesn't get through. Coaching is about wills. You have to outwill players sometimes and get them to give up their selfish motives.

DP: *Is there anything this Lakers team does better than the last two championship teams?*

PJ: They're capable of controlling games with ball movement, size and creating a pace they want to play in.

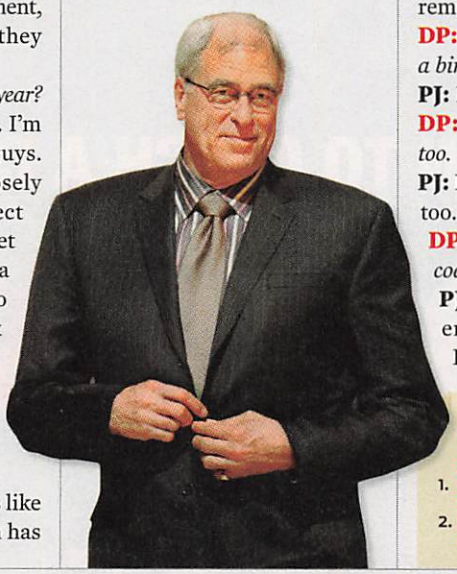
DP: *Are you having fun this year?*

PJ: I'm enjoying this year. I'm kind of beholden to the guys. We have a unit that's closely tied together. They connect pretty well. At times they get disconnected. Sometimes a long road trip will do that to a team. They might get sick of each other traveling for two weeks and need a day apart. To come together now is important. Every game is a meaningful thing. You play 82 of them. Seems like a lot, but every one of them has a certain impact on the team.

DP: *Your girlfriend, Jeanie Buss, said you can't be a homebody after you're done coaching the Lakers.*

PJ: I don't see myself being a homebody. I spent 40 years in basketball. I feel like I deserve a chance to live what I call a "civilian's life"—someone that's not programmed by a schedule and has to play games at night. I want to watch *Modern Family.* That's what my kids tell me I have to watch.

DP: *Do you think Clippers rookie Blake Griffin needs to change his game to develop his career?*



PJ: This guy is going to be a multidimensional player. He's not going to be content just doing those twirling, whirling dunks. As his progress goes along, we all hope he does have the ability to monitor when it's important to do that type of slam. There's a reason his knee gave out last year. You can only contort and extend that body so often. Sometimes it's going to get you in trouble.

DP: *Did you have to say that to Michael at some point?*

PJ: A lot of my friends used to say, "Tell Michael he doesn't have to dunk anymore. He's proven he can do that. Keep working on that jump shot. Someone's going to take him down. It could be ruinous." But in Michael's last three years he was very considerate about monitoring his game. He dunked the ball to make sure it was going to go in. But it wasn't the type that was happening in the '80s.

DP: *Paul Silas said Jordan could still average 20 points per game. What do you think?*

PJ: He could for a game or two. I don't think four or five games a week. It's a grind. You can't do it at age 37 or 38, let alone 48. It's a long shot, but this guy's remarkable.

DP: *Has Michael ever bought you a birthday present?*

PJ: He gave me a watch.

DP: *He's given you a few rings too.*

PJ: I helped him get a few rings too. It's not a one-way street.

DP: *Is this your final go-round coaching?*

PJ: I'm fully determined to end my career as a coach. Like that? □

Now Hear This

Listen to the podcasts at **danpatrick.com**

1. **Dusty Baker** on the mystery of Sammy Sosa's corked bat.
2. **Kurt Busch** discusses how he approaches racing his brother.

Shot Down

Former Celtics great Kevin McHale, an unabashed Rajon Rondo fan, isn't concerned about the Boston point guard's inconsistent jumper. McHale thinks that's one of the reasons Rondo *(above)* is so effective: "You lay off him, then he has great angles to see," McHale said. "There's no pressure on him. He never turns it over, because his guy is eight feet away from him."

Save Our Season

Roger Goodell hasn't asked for advice, but here's some: The gloom and doom has to stop. Let's turn to some positive alternatives to an NFL lockout. My audience and I have come up with the beginnings of a plan to make both sides happy: add a second bye week and four more playoff teams to extend the postseason. Owners get their extra weeks of football without putting players through more wear and tear. Is it perfect? No, but we're trying and won't stop until they kick off right on time on Sept. 8, 2011.

Line of the week

Daytona 500 champion Trevor Bayne, explaining how he didn't think he'd win the race even as he sped toward the checkered flag: **"I was like, Well, it would be cool to tell my friends I was leading the last lap of the Daytona 500."**

THE FINE PRINT: Record number of caution flags at Daytona. This is absolutely the last year that they use a crossing guard.

MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II/IDEUCE3 PHOTOGRAPHY (PATRICK); BOB ROSATO (RONDO); BRIAN CZOBAT/AUTOSTOCK (BAYNE); ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (JACKSON)

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Faces in the Crowd

Edited by ALEXANDRA FENWICK

Mark Jones

SUMMIT, N.J. > Indoor Track and Field

Mark, a senior at Summit High, high-jumped 7' 0" at the Group 2 Relays to tie the Union County indoor record and become part of the first father-son tandem to jump seven feet in high school; his father, Bob, also cleared that height as a senior at East New Brunswick High in 1977. Last year, Mark won the New Balance Nationals outdoor title with a jump of 6' 10¾".

Kayla Kiernan

NORTH SMITHFIELD, R.I. > Ice Hockey

Kayla, a senior center and captain at North Smithfield High, scored four times in a 5–2 victory over Cranston Co-op to become the state's first girl to reach 100 goals. The game took place hours after her father had suffered a minor stroke. Her first goal gave Kayla the career record in Rhode Island; her last took her to the century mark. Kayla was named all-state last year.

Conor White

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, FLA. > Rowing

Conor, a senior and co-captain at The Bolles School, won the 2,000-meter men's high school lightweight category at the Southern Sprints indoor rowing race in Melbourne, Fla., with a time of 6:31. In 2009 and '10 he earned a combined five gold medals in national and international competition as a member of U.S. Rowing's junior national development team.

Tyra Buss

MOUNT CARMEL, ILL. > Basketball

Tyra, a freshman guard at Mount Carmel High, scored 32 points in a loss to Teutopolis High to become the first freshman girl in Illinois history to surpass 1,000 points in a single season; her 1,025 points at season's end is the state's fifth-highest girls' single-season points total. In January she broke her school record for points in a game with 52 in a victory over F.J. Reitz High.

A.J. Zemke

OSHKOSH, WIS. > Wrestling

A.J., a senior at Lourdes High, won the 145-pound title at the Oshkosh On the Water Classic, beating his final opponent in sudden-death triple overtime. Through Sunday, he was 48–0 and had extended his winning streak to 77 matches. In 2010, A.J. was the state's Division III 135-pound champion and a member of the winning Greco-Roman junior nationals team.

Shannon Foreman

CHARLOTTE > Swimming

Shannon, a junior at Ardrey Kell High, led the Knights to their first Southwestern 4A title, winning the 50- and 100-yard freestyles. With her team trailing by nine points going into the final event, Shannon anchored the 4 × 100 free relay, finishing first by .09 of a second to clinch a 568–565 victory and snap rival Providence High's 19-year conference-title winning streak.

Nominate Now on SI.com

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to **SI.com/faces**

MUSIC

Title Match

Do two sporty CDs really have game?

Records are a big part of sports. But sports aren't necessarily a part of records, even those that are actually called *Sports*. Here's how two albums by that name—one classic and one that broke big this month—stack up:

Huey Lewis And the News
Sports
1983

TUNES Huey & Co.'s third album features soul and doo-wop influences, harmonized vocals.
ACCOLADES Seven-time platinum with four top 10 hits.
JOCK CHECK San Francisco outfit—whose lead singer is an avid fly-fisherman—performed *The Star-Spangled Banner* at Giants' 1985 opener and again before Game 4 of the 2010 NLCS. Follow-up album was named *Fore!*
SWEATY SOUNDS Zero references to games or athletes, save for cover's sports-bar backdrop.

Weekend
Sports
2010

TUNES Band's first full-length album is a mix of noise rock, lo-fi and shoegaze.
ACCOLADES *Pitchfork* awarded it a stellar 8.2 rating; *Rolling Stone* called it a "marvelous racket."
JOCK CHECK Vocalist and bassist Shaun Durkan says the trio, also from San Francisco, are big Giants, Niners and Warriors fans. The album title, he explains, alludes to a conflict or struggle, which translates musically into a "balance of melody and noise."
SWEATY SOUNDS Again, no overt sports refs—unless one jumps out at you from the Rorschach-test-like cover art.

—Rebecca Shore

ROBERT JONES (JONES); BILL NANGLE (KIERNAN); JULIE VAN VOORHIS (WHITE); COURTESY OF RYAN JENKINS (BUSS); MINDY MAYS (ZEMKE); BOB BEAMER/ARDREY KELL SPORTS PHOTO (FOREMAN); CAPITOL RECORDS (HUEY LEWIS AND THE NEWS); SLUMBERLAND RECORDS (WEEKEND)

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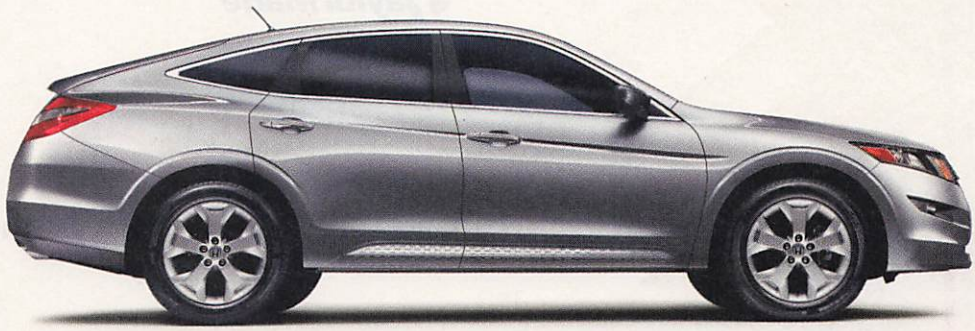

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Inside

MANHATTAN PROJECT
Martin (inset, right) went nuclear on his team during a sluggish start; Pullen (0) has responded with an explosive second-half turnaround.

Photographs by **GREG NELSON**

LOU CAPOZZOLA (HARDY)

Vital Signs

A February winning streak has pumped new life into the season for preseason darling Kansas State | BY PABLO S. TORRE

For most of the season Manhattan, Kans., resembled the site of a morbid experiment: How much stress could a team inflict on itself before surrendering completely? But last week, after four months of unrest and controversy, Kansas State finally showed signs of life. On Feb. 14—the same day that hated Kansas was voted the No. 1 team in the country—the Wildcats trounced the Jayhawks at Bramlage Coliseum, 84–68, behind a career-high 38 points from preseason All-America guard Jacob Pullen. Five days later Pullen poured in 27 points and had five steals in a 77–62 drubbing of Oklahoma.

K-State (18–9, 6–6 Big 12) has won four of its last five—with only a 58–56 last-second loss at Colorado on Feb. 12 spoiling that otherwise perfect stretch.

How did things go so wrong for Kansas State—a consensus top five preseason pick that Pullen was supposed to lead to the Big 12 title and the Final Four? The trouble started early.

In mid-December, Pullen and senior forward Curtis Kelly were suspended for three and six games, respectively, for receiving clothing discounts at a Dillard's department store. (Kelly had already been held out of the year's first three games for what coach Frank Martin called poor practice habits.) In the first game without both players, K-State lost to UNLV, after which Martin tore into his players so furiously that the assembled reporters could hear the tirade from outside. That night junior forward Jamar Samuels told reporters, "We'll try that leadership thingy Frank is talking about."

But this "thingy" took far longer to catch on. In January a frustrated Pullen said he would refuse to play if the Wildcats made the NIT, and the team's frontcourt—which once figured to be its biggest strength—was decimated when junior center Freddy Asprilla and sophomore forward Wally Judge left the team in the span of 16 days. (Both seemed unhappy playing for Martin.) All told, K-State lost five of eight games in January to plunge to 14–8.

"When those guys left, it made us closer as a team," says Samuels. "We just promised each other that nobody else can leave. We need everybody we can to make a long run."

And with Pullen embracing that leadership thingy—he's now scored at least 20 points in eight of 12 Big 12 games—the Wildcats have finally found their fight. Samuels says blood was shed during the practice after the Colorado loss. "It was so intense: elbowing, rug-burns, guys on the floor." Unmistakable signs of life. □

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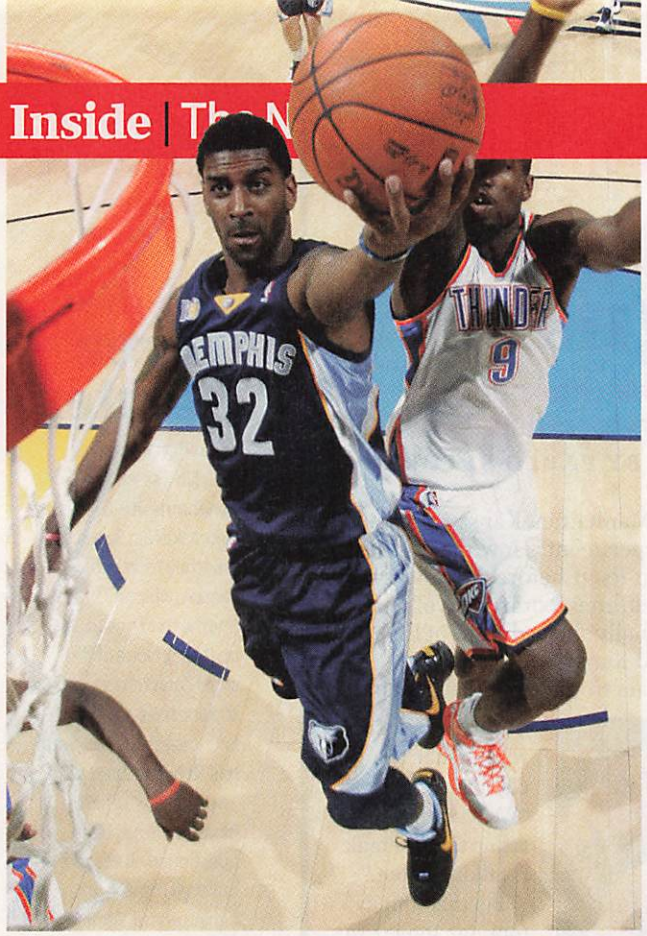
SETH DAVIS'S Three Pointer

Texas hurt its chance for a No. 1 seed. The Longhorns' 70–67 loss at Nebraska last Saturday was their fourth this season, which includes another bad one at USC on Dec. 5. None of the other candidates for the top line have more than two losses. . . . Utah State has all but secured a bid. The Aggies' strength of schedule has been questioned all season, but their come-from-behind win at Saint Mary's on Saturday night solidified their at-large résumé should they falter in the WAC tournament. . . . Nobody has played better over the last month than **Dwight Hardy** from St. John's. The 6' 2" senior guard has averaged 24.4 points during his last seven games, and he hit the game-winning layup in the Red Storm's last-second upset of Pittsburgh.



Secret Weapons

Here's a five-spot of unheralded players who could be big difference-makers down the stretch | BY CHRIS MANNIX

With seven weeks to go in the season, the jockeying for playoff seeding has already begun. At week's end Boston, Miami and Chicago were separated by two games at the top of the Eastern Conference standings while Indiana, Charlotte and Milwaukee were 3½ games apart in the race for eighth. Out west, Memphis and Utah were tied for the No. 8 seed, just 1½ games behind No. 5 Portland. Here are five under-the-radar players who could give their teams a boost during the stretch run.

Delonte West, *G, Boston*

A 10-game suspension for pleading guilty to carrying a concealed weapon plus a broken right wrist suffered on Nov. 24 have limited West to five games this season. He's due back this week, and the Celtics are counting on the 6' 3" combo guard to reduce the workload on Rajon Rondo (37.7 minutes per game) and Ray Allen (36.1) while also playing alongside them in three-guard sets until Marquis Daniels, who is out indefinitely with a neck injury, returns to the lineup.

O.J. Mayo, *G, Memphis*

Mayo's season has been one problem after another: In November he lost his starting job, and in January he scuffled with Tony Allen on the team plane and drew a 10-game suspension for violating the league's substance abuse policy. Still, Rudy Gay's shoulder injury could necessitate Mayo's return to the starting lineup, where he has been much more productive.

DON'T HOLD THE MAYO
The Grizzlies guard is more productive as a starter than he is coming off the bench.

His three-point percentage is 40.7 when he starts, 32.3 when he comes off the bench.

Timofey Mozgov, *C, New York*

Mozgov was handed a starting job that he wasn't ready for early in the season. Now the timing is right. After sitting out all but three games in January while he adjusted to the NBA, the 7' 1", 250-pound Russian rookie started five of the Knicks' seven in February, averaging 7.3 points and 5.4 rebounds in 22.4 minutes. Starting a natural center should take pressure off Amar'e Stoudemire, a power forward who has been forced to play out of position for most of the season.

Paul George, *F, Indiana*

Few players have benefited more from the Pacers' coaching change than George, who went from a fits-and-starts role under Jim O'Brien to steady minutes under Frank Vogel. The 6' 8" George has demonstrated an ability to be a defensive stopper—he held Dwyane Wade to 5-of-14 shooting last month—while cracking double figures in six of the last 10 games.

Roddy Beaubois, *G, Dallas*

With Caron Butler out for the season, the Mavs desperately need another scorer off the bench. Enter Beaubois, who scored 13 points in his season debut last week after missing the first 54 games of the year with a fractured right foot. The wispy (6-foot, 170 pounds) second-year guard came on strong at the end of last season, doubling his scoring average to 10.2 points in the second half of 2009–10. Dallas is penciling Beaubois into their fourth guard spot behind Jason Kidd, DeShawn Stevenson and Jason Terry. □

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FAST BREAK

Labor Pains

The NBA and the players' union were able to agree on one thing during a two-hour meeting in Los Angeles last week: With four months left in the current collective bargaining agreement, the two sides are still miles apart. Owners are seeking sweeping changes to the system while players believe smaller changes, such as greater revenue sharing, will restore the financial balance. "You can't revenue-share your way to a profit as a league," said NBA commissioner **David Stern**. "It doesn't solve a problem if there are losses." Both sides are bracing for a lockout in July, and it will likely be a long one. An ownership source told SI that the feeling among owners is that the differences between the two sides are so significant it is "very possible" there won't be a 2011–12 season.

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Falling Star

The go-go Capitals are struggling, in part because opponents have figured out how to stop Alex Ovechkin | BY BRIAN CAZENEUVE

Here's how bad things are for the Capitals: The most memorable highlight from a 4–1 home loss to the Kings on Feb. 12 took place during a third-period timeout. From the bench, beleaguered coach Bruce Boudreau addressed his players with his arms swinging, his eyes wide, his head bobbing. He showed more emotion in his entreaty than his team did during 60 minutes of listless hockey. "I didn't chew the guys out," Boudreau insists. "I encouraged them."

Once the NHL's most entertaining team, Washington has devolved into the most puzzling one, trying to play its way through a mystifying power outage. Through Sunday, the club that led the league in scoring by a whopping 45 goals last season with 313 was tied for 15th with just 162, despite having made few significant roster changes. The Capitals ran away with the Presidents' Trophy with 121 points in 2009–10, but now stand fifth in the Eastern Conference. They have been shut out eight times—two off the league high.

Yes, the club made a conscious decision—in the wake of blowing a 3–1 series lead against the Canadiens in the first round of the playoffs last spring—to be more defensively attentive, leading some to refer to the team as the Trapitals. Washington's goals-against average has improved from 16th to seventh best. But the Capitals don't trap in man-advantage situations, and their power play, which led the NHL last year (79 goals), has fallen to 22nd. Alex Ovechkin, formerly the sport's most dynamic scorer, has only four power play goals, and between Oct. 30 and Feb. 4 he went 41 games without one.

Theories abound to explain the struggles of Ovechkin, who has averaged 53.8 goals per season in his career but is on pace for just 31: He's still in a funk from the 7–3 beatdown Canada put on his Russian team at the Vancouver Olympics; he has become tentative since being slapped with a two-game suspension for boarding, and injuring, the Blackhawks' Brian Campbell last spring; he's lost a step.

CAP-SIZING
Ovechkin scored 13 goals for the NHL's top power play in 2009–10 but has only four this year for a unit that ranks 22nd.

The truth seems to be that the league has solved Ovechkin. Opponents used to back off him when he had the puck for fear he'd skate past them if they got too close. Now they beat him by being more physical. Both Ovechkin and Boudreau reject the notion that defenders have been getting in the face of Washington's captain more often. "You mean they weren't before?" Boudreau asks. But consider some anecdotal evidence. During a 7–0 loss to the Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Dec. 12 a frustrated Ovechkin started a fight with New York center Brandon Dubinsky. On Feb. 6 he took a nasty knee-to-knee blow from the Penguins' Matt Cooke. And last week the Coyotes' Derek Morris took a two-minute penalty for hooking Ovechkin 19 seconds after the opening face-off. "Teams were afraid to take a penalty against us last year," Ovechkin says. "Now it's different. There is not so much fear."

Except perhaps in the nation's capital. □

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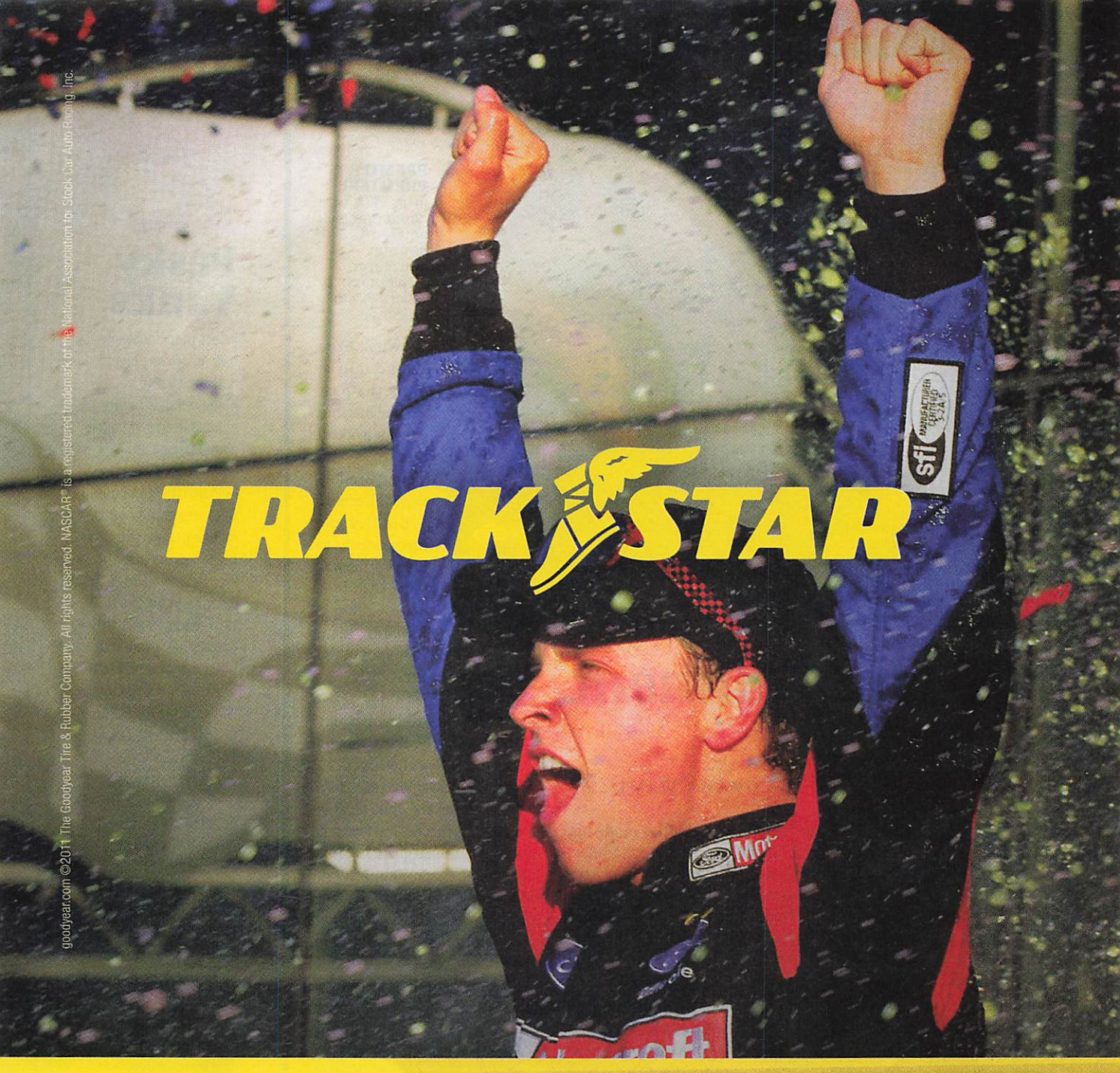
PIERRE McGUIRE'S In the Crease

The Blues traded defenseman Erik Johnson to the Avalanche for winger Chris Stewart last Saturday because of the rapid development of 21-year-old blueliner **Alex Pietrangelo**. St. Louis coaches were bothered by Johnson's lukewarm reception to coaching, and the club desperately needed a power forward.... The Stars are sinking in the Western Conference playoff race and might deal leading scorer (and potential unrestricted free agent) Brad Richards before the Feb. 28 trade deadline. Dallas cannot afford to lose him this summer without getting something in return.... If the surging Sharks make the playoffs, center Logan Couture should be named rookie of the year. He leads San Jose in goals (24) and the NHL in game-winning goals (eight).

KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS (OVECHKIN); DAVID E. KLUTHO (PIETRANGELO)



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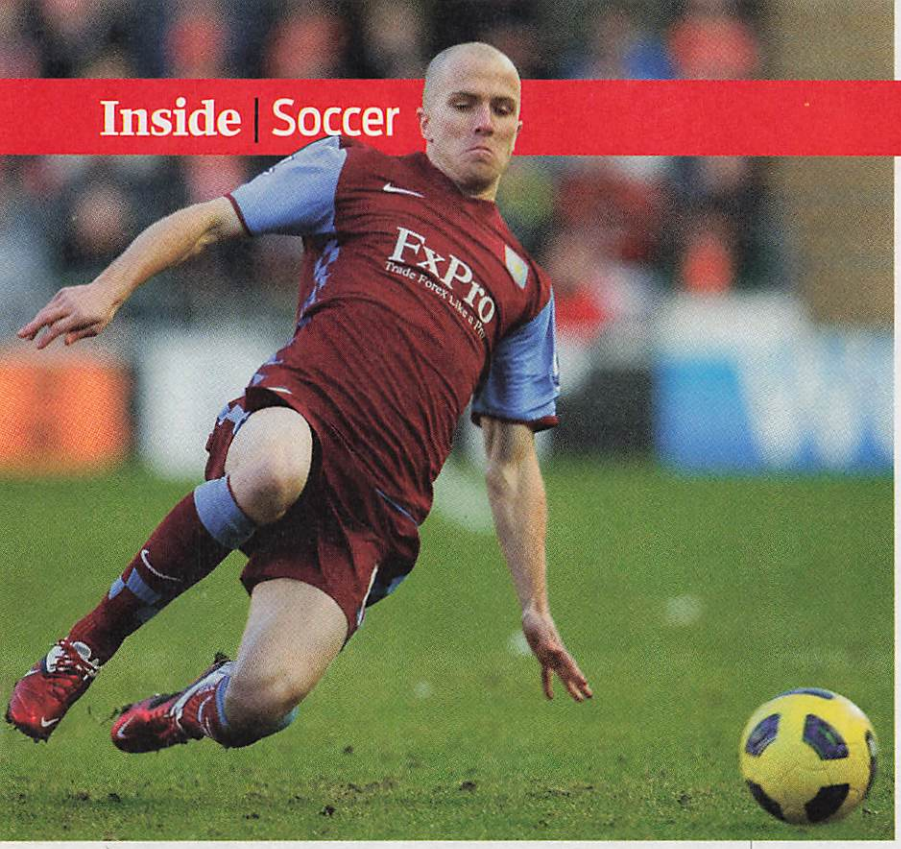

PREMIER PREMIERE In his Villa debut Bradley entered as a sub and played 17 minutes of a 1–1 draw with Blackpool.

Wish Fulfillment

Michael Bradley always dreamed of playing in the Premier League, and now he has his shot, with Aston Villa | BY GRANT WAHL

When U.S. midfielder Michael Bradley made his first trip to watch English Premier League games, he felt an admiration bordering on reverence. Bradley was 16, and he recalls his fascination with the players' speed, power and commitment, to say nothing of the fans' unwavering support for those who gave the maximum effort for 90 minutes. "I think that's something special," says Bradley, who moved to the Premier League's Aston Villa on loan from Germany's Borussia Mönchengladbach at the end of January. "It was eye-opening for me. It's always been something I wanted, to come and play here."

Now, at 23, Bradley has his chance. Following a standout performance at last year's World Cup, the hard-driving midfield general has continued his steady pro climb from MLS at age 16 to the Dutch Eredivisie at 18 and the German Bundesliga at 21. After making his Villa debut as a substitute on Feb. 12, Bradley could move to the starting lineup as soon as this Saturday against Blackburn Rovers, owing to a red-card suspension for teammate Jean Makoun that may last until mid-March. "The main thing for me is to show I'm a guy who should be on the field every week," Bradley says. "That's the challenge, whether [Makoun] is suspended or not."

Aston Villa has the option to buy Bradley's contract at season's end, and Bradley doesn't hide his hopes of becoming the latest American to sign full time with the team. He says he has already received a warm welcome from Villa's U.S. goalkeeper, Brad Friedel, and recently he spoke with Randy Lerner, the American who owns Aston Villa (and the Cleveland Browns). "You sense right away the passion he has, not only for [soccer] but for Aston Villa," Bradley says of Lerner.

Bradley has three months to do what he has done with four other teams, including Team USA: earn a regular spot in the starting lineup. Although he was a relatively unheralded prospect in his mid-teens, Bradley has shown a singular focus on becoming a so-called modern central midfielder, who can close down on attackers while serving as an engine that pushes forward to score occasional goals. Like his father, U.S. coach Bob Bradley, Michael is famous for his intensity. "He has no use for anything that doesn't help him get to the highest level," says U.S. assistant coach Jesse Marsch. "You can see that in the way he eats, the way he rests, the way he's in the gym at the right times."

"I want to get to the end of my career and say I played in the biggest games for the biggest clubs," Bradley says. "Until now there aren't really any Americans who have played consistently at the top of leagues, fighting to win Europa Leagues or Champions Leagues. To play on a good team that is able to win something would be special."

For a U.S. soccer player in Europe, it would be historic. □

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THROW-INS

Pesky Yanks

In less than one week two American players had a chance to be game-winning heroes against Premier League giant Chelsea. In league play on Feb. 14, Fulham midfielder Clint Dempsey earned a last-minute penalty against the Blues, but his spot kick was saved by Petr Cech, resulting in a 0–0 tie that gave the fifth-place Blues a valuable point in their effort to move up to fourth and win a spot in the 2011–12 Champions League. Then, last Saturday, Everton goalkeeper **Tim Howard** had an opportunity to deny Chelsea in a penalty-kick shootout to decide the teams' fourth-round FA Cup game after a 1–1 deadlock. Howard's save of Nicolas Anelka's kick turned the tide, and Everton knocked off the two-time defending FA Cup holder at Stamford Bridge.

NEVILLE WILLIAMS/ASTON VILLA FC/GETTY IMAGES (BRADLEY); RICHARD HEATHCOTE/GETTY IMAGES (HOWARD)

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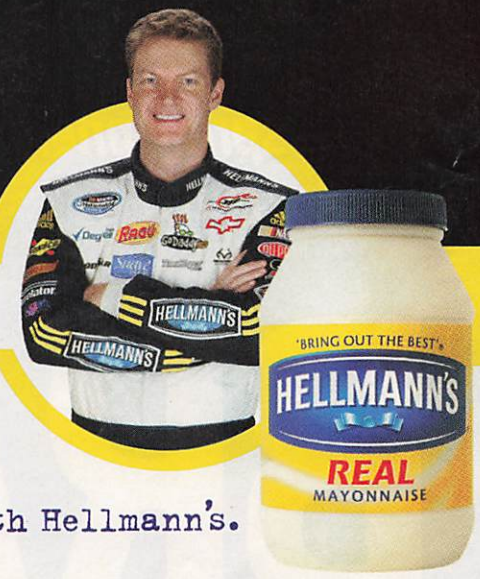

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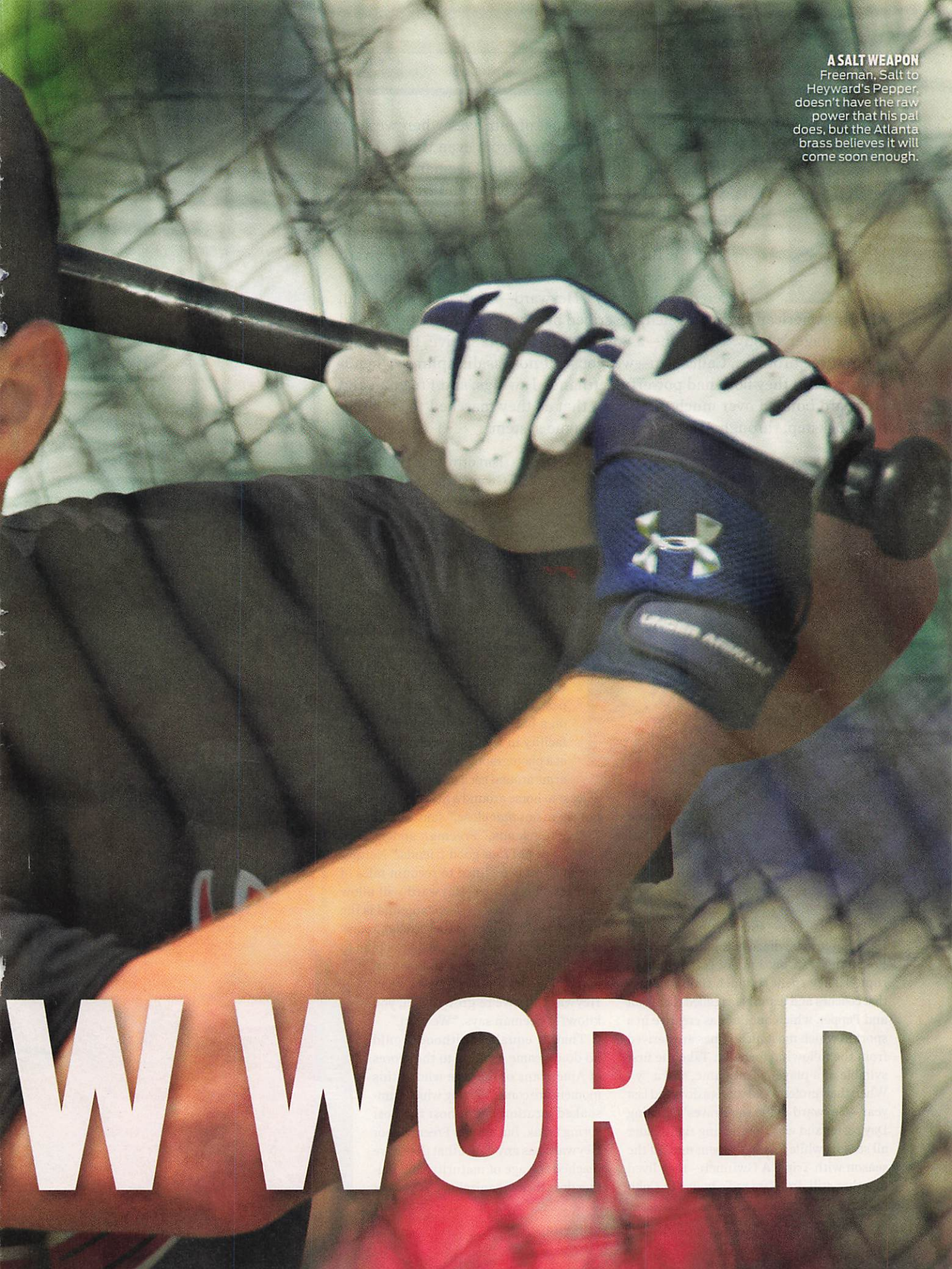
Sports Illustrated

Few teams groom young players for the majors as well—and as fearlessly—as Atlanta. In a pool of strong Rookie of the Year candidates, one stands out above the rest: first baseman Freddie Freeman, whose big bat might remind you of last year's spring phenom

By Ben Reiter

Photographs by AL TIELEMANS

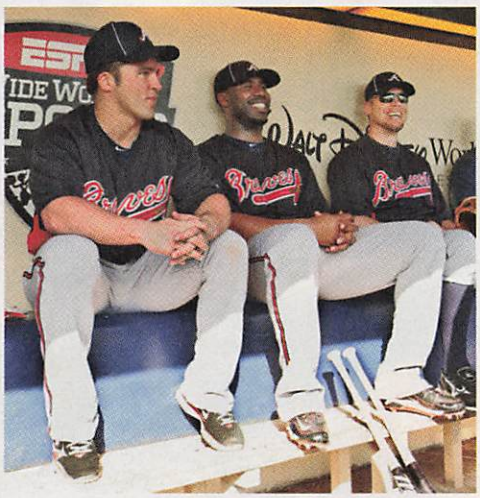
BRAVE NE



A SALT WEAPON
Freeman, Salt to Heyward's Pepper, doesn't have the raw power that his pal does, but the Atlanta brass believes it will come soon enough.

W WORLD

There comes a time in most of our lives when we seek to assert our distinctiveness from even those closest to us, to individuate. For Freddie Freeman and Jason Heyward, that time is now. Freeman and Heyward met at a high school All-American game in August 2006, and the two became close friends a year later, shortly after the Braves drafted them 64 slots apart. (Heyward was the 14th overall pick, Freeman the 78th.) They differed in many ways. Heyward—Georgian, a first child, African-American—was polished, described by teammates as a 40-year-old in a teenager's body. Freeman—a Southern California native, the youngest of three brothers, Caucasian—was loose, if no less disciplined when it counted. But they both had powerful lefthanded swings, and Freeman and Heyward bonded over much more than that as they marched together, in near lockstep, through Atlanta's minor league system.



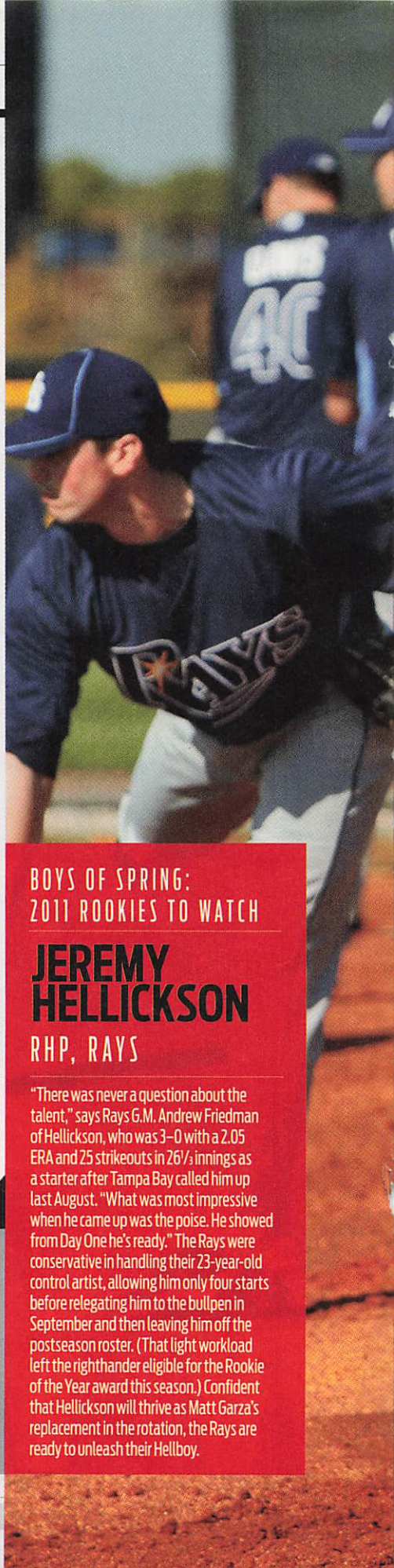
FEELING CHIPPER The Braves think Uggla (left) and Heyward (middle) will sustain the winning tradition that Jones (right) helped create.

They shared apartments and roomed together on the road. They ate together. If one didn't finish the other's sentences, it was only out of courtesy. ("If he starts with something, I kind of know where he's going with it," Freeman says, "but I'm not going to interrupt.") They spent so much time together that coaches and teammates called them Salt and Pepper, which qualifies as creative in a sport in which most nicknames are derived from the following formula: Take the first syllable of a player's last name, add a "y." When their professional careers diverged last year—Heyward made the Braves' Opening Day roster and was the starting rightfielder all season, while Freeman spent most of the season with Triple A Gwinnett—they lived together still, in Heyward's house in Cobb County, a short drive from both Turner Field and Gwinnett's ballpark.

The 6' 5", 242-pound Freeman—he's Salt—is about to be reunited on the field with his 6' 5", 240-pound shakermate. General manager Frank Wren says that among the Braves' decision-makers, "none of us has any doubt that he'll be our Opening Day first baseman." Though they will be teammates once more, Freeman and Heyward would not object if the theme of their inseparability became a thing of the past. During a photo shoot last Friday on a back field at the Braves' spring facility in Disney World, they balked at a photographer's request to put their arms around each other's shoulders, or at least to horse around a little. "We're close, but we're not *that* close," said Heyward.

"We're friends," Freeman added later, "but we're not *that* good friends." Neither one of them is inclined to recount tales of domestic high jinks (Heyward will allow that Freeman likes to sleep later and is the messier of the two), and they are not rooming together in Orlando and do not plan to during the season (although Freeman is considering a place a block from Heyward's). "We're grown men, you know?" Freeman says. "We're 21."

That 21 equals adulthood would no doubt come as news to the scores of Americans of that age who at this moment are contemplating which rum-soaked location might host the best spring break. But neither Freeman nor Heyward has any doubt that they have reached the age of maturity, and neither does their organization. "If you put



CHUCK SOLOMON (HELLICKSON)

ACE IN THE MAKING

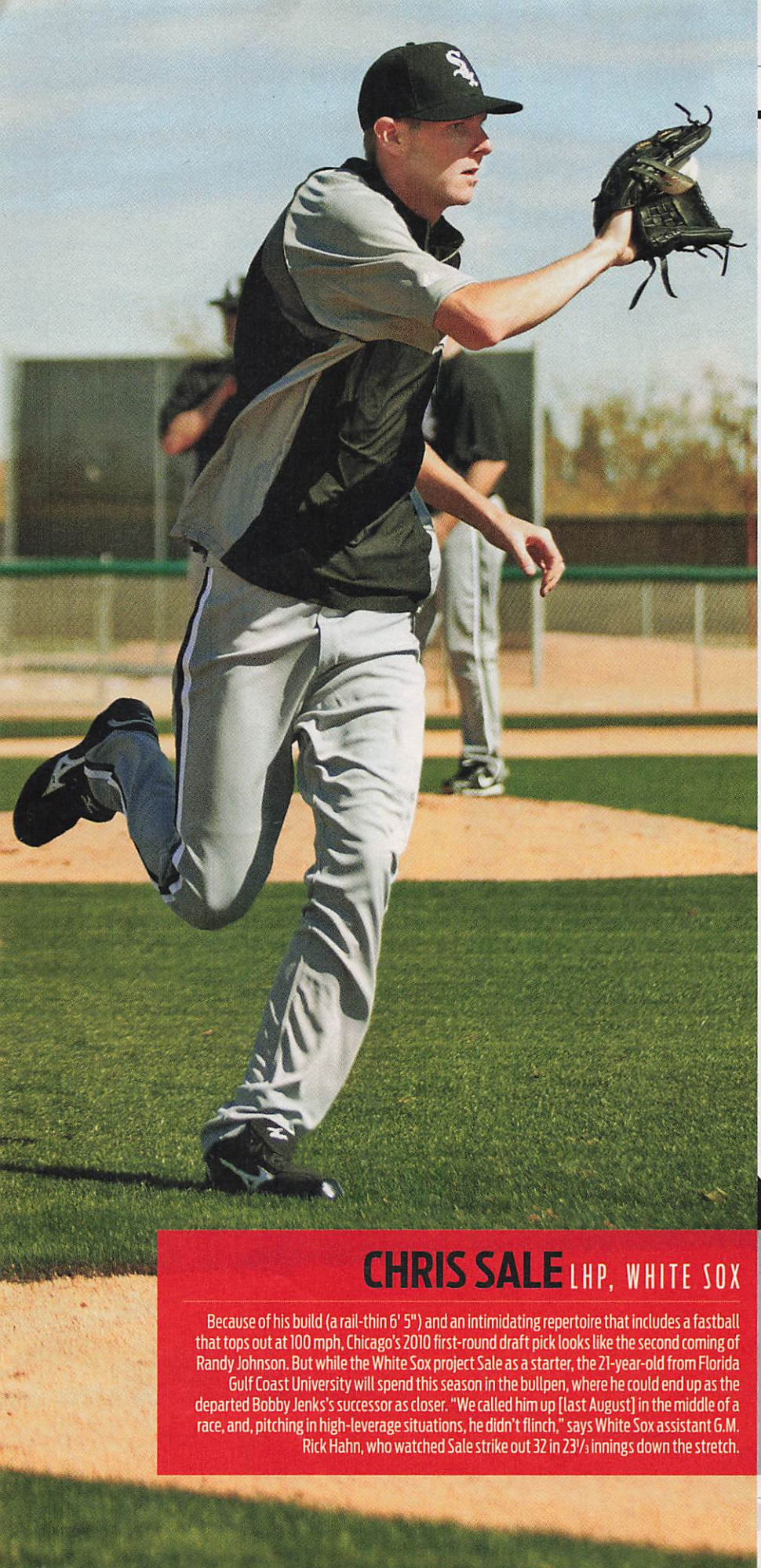
BOYS OF SPRING:
2011 ROOKIES TO WATCH

JEREMY HELLICKSON

RHP, RAYS

"There was never a question about the talent," says Rays G.M. Andrew Friedman of Hellickson, who was 3–0 with a 2.05 ERA and 25 strikeouts in 26⅓ innings as a starter after Tampa Bay called him up last August. "What was most impressive when he came up was the poise. He showed from Day One he's ready." The Rays were conservative in handling their 23-year-old control artist, allowing him only four starts before relegating him to the bullpen in September and then leaving him off the postseason roster. (That light workload left the righthander eligible for the Rookie of the Year award this season.) Confident that Hellickson will thrive as Matt Garza's replacement in the rotation, the Rays are ready to unleash their Hellboy.

DE LA ROSA
58



CHRIS SALE LHP, WHITE SOX

Because of his build (a rail-thin 6' 5") and an intimidating repertoire that includes a fastball that tops out at 100 mph, Chicago's 2010 first-round draft pick looks like the second coming of Randy Johnson. But while the White Sox project Sale as a starter, the 21-year-old from Florida Gulf Coast University will spend this season in the bullpen, where he could end up as the departed Bobby Jenks's successor as closer. "We called him up [last August] in the middle of a race, and, pitching in high-leverage situations, he didn't flinch," says White Sox assistant G.M. Rick Hahn, who watched Sale strike out 32 in 23 1/3 innings down the stretch.

JED JACOBSOHN (SALE)

a screen in front of them, and you couldn't tell who was on the other side, the way they talked to you, you'd think these guys are 27- or 28-year-old men," says Braves manager Fredi Gonzalez. Assuming Freeman makes the Opening Day lineup, they will be the third- and fourth-youngest regular position players in the majors—only Cubs shortstop Starlin Castro and Marlins outfielder Mike Stanton are younger—and they will become the Braves' first pair of 21-or-under regulars. Those bits of trivia are of no concern to Wren. "When you're talented, I don't think anyone's going to ask for your birth certificate," he says. "The umpires don't card."

Heyward is a five-tool phenom who was regarded as the game's top prospect last spring. He more than lived up to his billing, reaching base in nearly 40% of his plate appearances, hitting 18 home runs and finishing second to Giants catcher Buster Posey in the National League Rookie of the Year voting despite badly spraining his left thumb in May. (Heyward says that his thumb is now pain free, if not fully flexible.) Freeman may not possess Heyward's once-a-decade talent, but he is an elite prospect who hit .319 with 18 home runs and 87 RBIs and was named the 2010 International League Rookie of the Year. He and Phillies outfielder Domonic Brown are likely to be the NL's only rookie regulars when the season begins.

Were Freeman a member of another organization, he might expect to spend April and May back in the minors, as many clubs like to delay the debuts of big-league-ready prospects to arrest the ticking of their service-time clocks and their eligibility for arbitration and free agency. Four of the past eight rookies of the year—Posey, the Marlins' Chris Coghlan, the Rays' Evan Longoria and the Brewers' Ryan Braun—began their lauded rookie seasons in the minors. That is not how the Braves operate. "If you're leaving a young guy in Triple A because of service issues, I don't think you're holding up your end of the bargain with your players and your manager," says Wren.

Since Fred McGriff departed after the 1997 season, 24 men have played at least a dozen games at first base for Atlanta, but the Braves' plan is for Freeman to thrust his cleat into that long-revolving door. Freeman and Heyward are expected to become the young cornerstones of an evolving franchise, one with a new manager (Gonzalez takes over for the retired Bobby Cox, who had been filling out the Braves' lineup cards since 1990) and a new, slugging second baseman (Dan Uggla, who was acquired in a November trade with the Marlins and then given a five-year, $62 million contract extension). And they are expected to help the Braves win a playoff series for the first time since 2001; the most recent fruitless postseason effort was in October, when Atlanta played four one-run games, three of them losses, in the NLDS against the Giants. But Freeman and Heyward won't be alone in that effort.

MIDDLE MAN Gonzalez (center) seems like a younger version of Cox: easy to play for and not afraid to trust young players.

Old farts and young bucks," is how Peter Moylan, the Braves' sidewinding Aussie reliever, describes his club's roster. Moylan is one of the more colorful figures in the Atlanta clubhouse, literally and figuratively: He has sleeve tattoos covering both arms, and he views the game with a jocular perspective that he perhaps developed when *he* was 21 and a pro baseball washout, driving around the Australian state of Victoria as a pharmaceutical rep and throwing only on the weekends. (Moylan, now 32, was rediscovered by major league scouts while pitching for Australia in the 2006 World Baseball Classic.) His characterization of this year's Braves is as accurate as it is expressive: No team in baseball is likely to be as polarized, agewise, as Atlanta.

A baseball player's peak years tend to come between the ages of 26 and 32, and players in that range make up the majority of the major leagues: According to the projected rosters at mlbdepthcharts.com, the 30 clubs

CHUCK SOLOMON (BROWN)

FIVE-TOOL TALENT

DOMONIC BROWN OF, PHILLIES

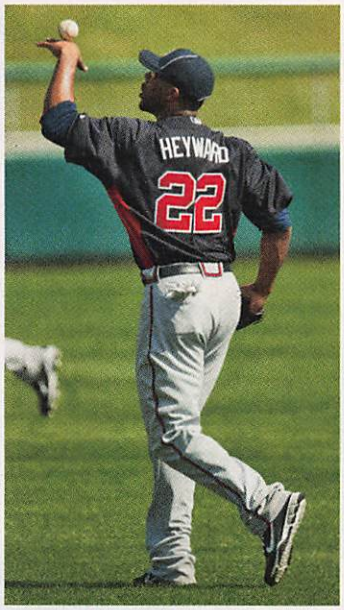
After a forgettable stint in the Dominican winter league—he went 2 for 29 for Escogido before heading home early because he "just played bad"—Brown spent the rest of his off-season bulking up (adding 10 pounds of muscle) and tweaking his swing (his new stroke is more compact). The prize prospect, a five-tool talent who hit .210 in 35 games with Philly last season, hopes the winter work helps him lock down the rightfield job vacated by free agent Jayson Werth. The Phillies, though, may start the season with Brown, 23, in a platoon. "He played in the minors for a short period of time," says manager Charlie Manuel. "He's still definitely learning how to play baseball."

average 14.5 players who will be in their primes on Opening Day. No fewer than 21 Twins fall into that range.

The Braves? They might start the season with only 10 peak players, assuming that bench candidates Diory Hernandez, 26, and Joe Mather, 28, make the club. That number ties them with the Yankees for the league's fewest, but there is a significant difference in the roles of the young players on each team. Aside from starters Phil Hughes and Ivan Nova, the Yankees' 25-and-unders will most likely be marginal contributors. The Braves' will be Freeman and Heyward, three of their five starting pitchers (Tommy Hanson, Jair Jurrjens and rookie Mike Minor) and rookie closer Craig Kimbrel.

Not that the Braves are devoid of in-their-prime stars. They have a quartet of 26-to-32-year-olds who have been selected to a combined nine All-Star Games: catcher Brian McCann (27), centerfielder Nate McLouth (29), infielder Martin Prado (27) and Uggla (30), who has averaged 30.8 home runs in his five seasons in the majors. Still, the fact remains: The Braves' hopes in 2011 will largely rest upon players who are either rather old or rather young. If this is not Wren's ideal design, then it is the fruit of a philosophy his organization (which he joined in 1999, as the assistant G.M. to John Schuerholz) developed 20 years ago. The Braves' cadre of talented 25-and-unders is one outcome of its unwavering focus on scouting and development. Their refusal to behave like anything but the financially middle-class club they are means that they avoid locking themselves into long-term deals with peaking free agents. Instead, they prefer to address needs with slightly older players with shorter deals. The result of this approach, says Rangers G.M. Jon Daniels: "They can develop and win at the same time, which is the most challenging thing to do in the game."

BALANCED ATTACK
In theory Heyward is five years away from his peak, but his bat helps bridge Atlanta's generation gap.



"That's been the formula," says Gonzalez. "They keep injecting good young players into the mix of good, established veterans." Gonzalez was Cox's third base coach from 2003 through '06 and therefore was more familiar than any other managerial candidate with Atlanta's organizational philosophy. To the surprise of no one, he was hired shortly after Cox managed his last game, in the NLDS. This was no effort to shake up the status quo on a team that has gone 15 years without a World Series championship. In fact, the idea seems to have been to replace Cox with a 22-years-younger version of him. "A lot of my beliefs and a lot of the stuff I feel strongly about comes from him," says Gonzalez. "I think we're pretty close, personalitywise."

The Braves' veterans all seem to feel that way: Moylan, asked to describe how this spring training might be different, didn't mention his new manager until reminded of him. That group includes their longest-tenured player, the oldest and most accomplished of them all, and the one who led the lobbying for Gonzalez to succeed Cox. Chipper Jones, Wren says, is "the guy that transitions us from our last championship to our next one."

The left corner of his mouth still curls up when he speaks, in that old familiar way, but otherwise Jones finally looks his age. He will turn 39 on April 24, making him the senior Brave by more than a year. He's got six scarred-over holes in his left knee and three in his right. He is thickly built and stubbly now—15 seasons, an MVP award and a batting title removed from being that slim, smooth-faced rookie who played third base for the 1995 world champs and naturally assumed that there would be many more parades in his future.

That there have been none was one reason Jones decided over the winter not to retire, a move he had been considering before tearing his left ACL last August. That he truly believes there might be one this year was the other reason. And for that, Braves fans can, in part,

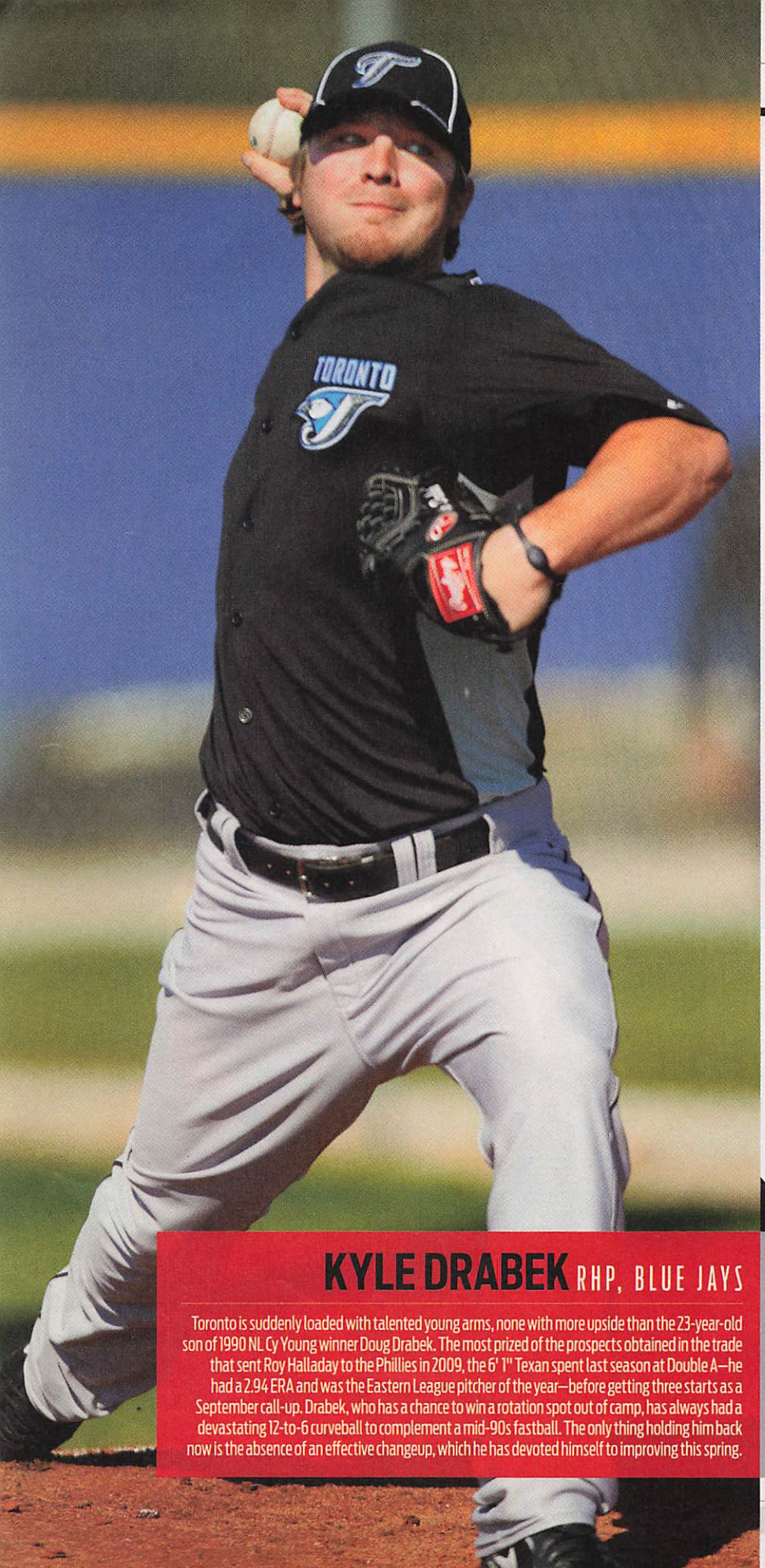
CATCHER ON THE RISE

HANK CONGER
C, ANGELS

This winter the Angels felt they could afford to deal slugging catcher Mike Napoli to the Blue Jays (he was later flipped to the Rangers) in large part because of the emergence of the 23-year-old Conger. A switch-hitter with excellent gap-to-gap power, the team's first-round pick in 2006 is still raw: He logged his first full pro season only two years ago because of a rash of injuries early in his career. Conger, a .297 career hitter in the minors, will compete this spring with Jeff Mathis and Bobby Wilson for playing time, but the aging and expensive Angels are eager to get younger. "For a guy with not much playing experience," says manager Mike Scioscia, "he is really advanced in calling and running a game. We're confident that he's very close."

JED JACOBSOHN (CONGER)

MIZUNO
ANGELS BASEBALL 50TH ANNIVERSARY
50
1961
ALL-STAR



KYLE DRABEK RHP, BLUE JAYS

Toronto is suddenly loaded with talented young arms, none with more upside than the 23-year-old son of 1990 NL Cy Young winner Doug Drabek. The most prized of the prospects obtained in the trade that sent Roy Halladay to the Phillies in 2009, the 6' 1" Texan spent last season at Double A—he had a 2.94 ERA and was the Eastern League pitcher of the year—before getting three starts as a September call-up. Drabek, who has a chance to win a rotation spot out of camp, has always had a devastating 12-to-6 curveball to complement a mid-90s fastball. The only thing holding him back now is the absence of an effective changeup, which he has devoted himself to improving this spring.

thank the presence of Freeman and Heyward.

Now Jones sits in his corner locker in the Braves' Disney World clubhouse, his knee almost healed. A few lockers to his left, Freeman is holding up a new pair of spikes, just out of their shipping box, for the approval of Heyward across the room. "Whatever, they're still attached at the hip, man," Jones says of the idea that his youngest teammates are more independent now. "These guys want to get married and have kids, they'd better separate."

Just a joke, he makes clear. "There's nothing wrong with those two hanging out," he says. "I think they kind of have a friendly rivalry, such as what Andruw [Jones] and I had through our younger years. It's a good thing. A guy goes out and hits .300, hits 30 home runs and drives in 100 runs, the other guy wants to do the same thing."

You start to notice life cycles when you've played as long as Jones has. In some ways, though, Freeman's story is unique. His mother, Rosemary, died of melanoma in 2000, leaving her husband, Fred, to raise three boys of 16, 13 and 10. Freddie was the 10-year-old. In the melancholy time to follow, Fred, suddenly a single parent, worried about his sons' emotional well-being and their safety—particularly that of Freddie, who was too young to be left alone. So Fred, a partner in an accounting firm in Villa Park, Calif., would wait to take his lunch breaks until five to two, when his youngest son's school day was over. He would pick Freddie up, and the two would drive to Handy Park. For the next hour he would throw strike after strike to his son, who would meet the ball with a swing that grew prettier by the day, like those of his idols, Chili Davis and Garret Anderson. "First of all, he was safe, and I didn't have to worry about him for that hour," Fred recalls. "We didn't talk a lot. I just threw, and he'd hit, and then he'd go down the rightfield line, and I'd go down the leftfield line, and we'd throw all the balls into center and pick them up together. Day after day after day."

After batting practice Fred and his son would drive back to the accounting firm, where Freddie would do his homework in an empty office until it was time to go home for dinner. "He grew up very fast after his mom passed away," Fred says. "I couldn't be there to stand over him all the time, so he had to do some things on his own."

CHUCK SOLOMON (DRABEK)

Even as Freddie skyrocketed up the California youth baseball circuit, and then as scouts started scribbling furiously during his at bats, Fred, standing further and further back, continued to throw to his son every afternoon. "Count the days we didn't," Fred says. "I'd like to take credit for his swing"—a smooth, mechanically enviable effort that is far more artful than Heyward's violent lash—"but I didn't do anything. I just threw to him."

CATCHING ON Freeman, who still turns to his dad to hone his swing, homered off Roy Halladay during his brief call-up last year.

Of course those sessions were about more than just throwing and hitting. Just last week, as Freeman prepared to leave Orange County for spring training, he and his dad went out to their old field. Fred threw and Freddie hit, and afterward Freddie picked up balls down the rightfield line and Fred those that had settled along the leftfield line, and they threw all the balls into center and then picked them up.

The Braves have no desire to change what Freeman has always done. "There's not a part of his game that I think he needs to focus on and improve," says Wren. "He has a very good swing and uses the whole field. I think that's going to help him at the next level. I think what we hope will develop is something that will happen naturally, not something he needs to work on—more power. We're not going to spend time trying to teach him how to hit with more power."

Controlled, natural cycles are what Wren seeks—not the sine curves of rebuilding and competing that some other organizations follow but a fluid process whereby young stars are constantly complementing and then replacing their aging predecessors. It's a formula that has helped the Braves to 18 winning seasons in the last 20 years. "The way our club is balanced, I think it sets us up for the future," Wren says. "*Now* and the future."

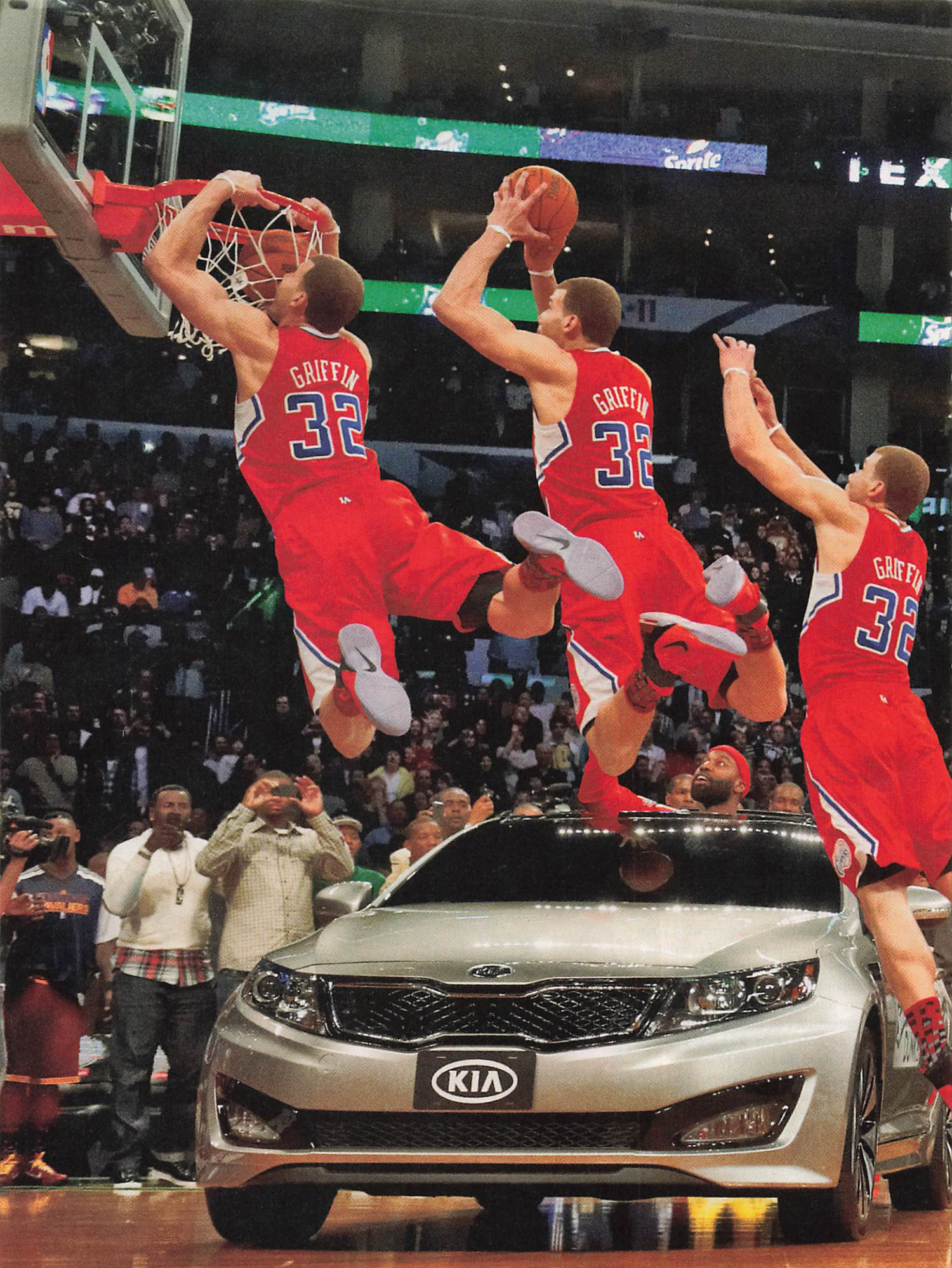
The plan is that Freddie Freeman and Jason Heyward will be integral to both, together. □

JED JACOBSOHN (BELT)

SWEET SLUGGER

BRANDON BELT 1B, GIANTS

The Giants may have another Buster Posey, last year's NL Rookie of the Year. Belt, a fifth-round draft pick in 2009, is a 6' 5", 210-pound, sweet-swinging lefty whom scouts liken to Will Clark. He was drafted in the 11th round by the Braves four years ago as a pitcher (he opted to go to Texas), but he has bloomed at the plate after revamping his stance and swing with the Giants. A slick fielder, he led the minor leagues in OPS (1.075) in 2010, and if he doesn't begin this year launching balls into McCovey Cove, he should force an early-season promotion and make an instant impact the way Posey did after his May call-up last year.


GRIFFIN
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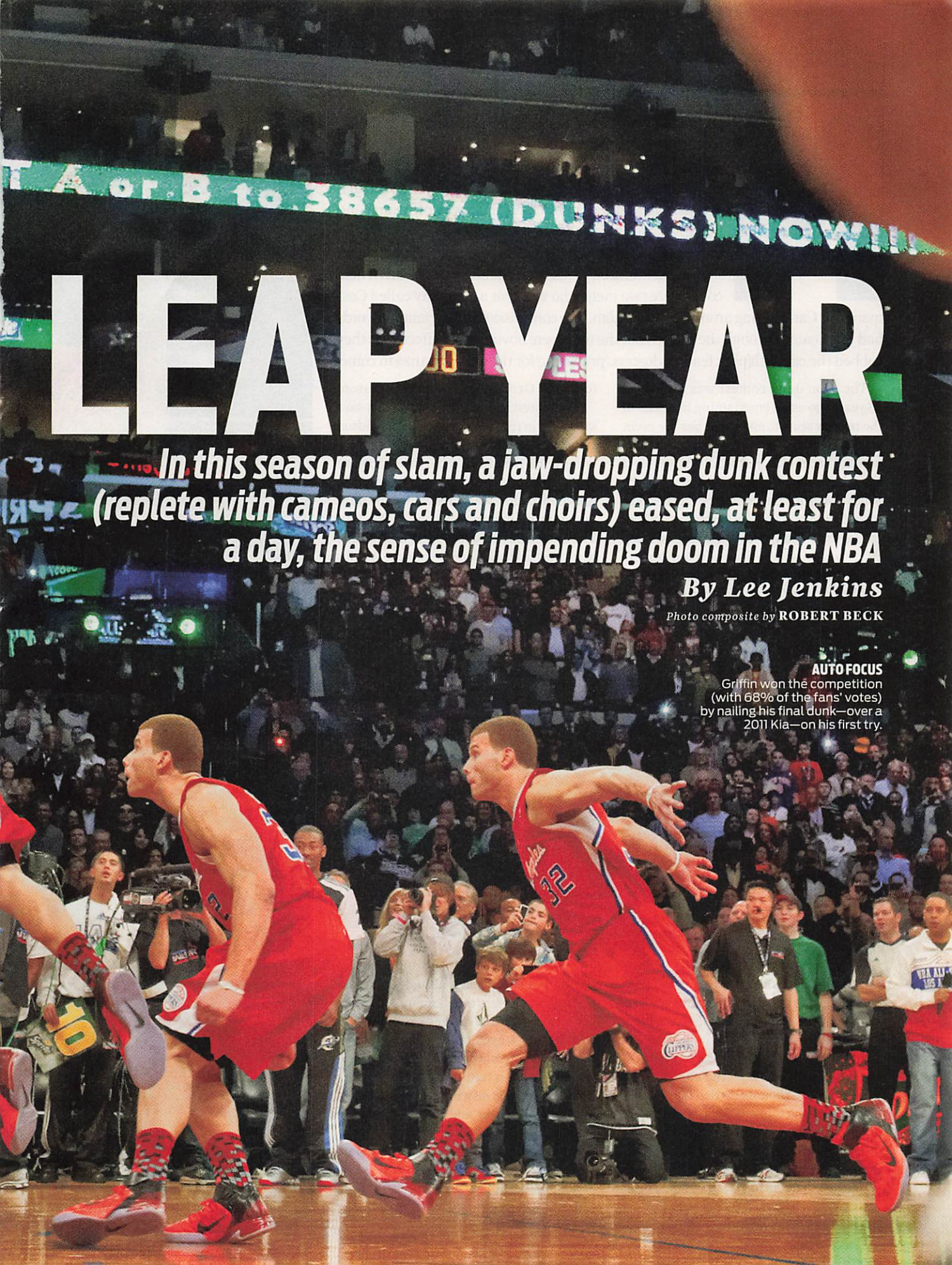
KIA

LEAP YEAR

In this season of slam, a jaw-dropping dunk contest (replete with cameos, cars and choirs) eased, at least for a day, the sense of impending doom in the NBA

By Lee Jenkins

Photo composite by **ROBERT BECK**



AUTO FOCUS
Griffin won the competition (with 68% of the fans' votes) by nailing his final dunk—over a 2011 Kia—on his first try.

NBA commissioner David Stern delivered his state of the union in a crowded interview room beneath Staples Center last Saturday afternoon. In a sobering address he discussed the imperiled franchises considering relocation, the disgruntled headliners politicking their way off teams and the unshrinking chasm that separates owners and players in negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement.

About a hundred yards from the stage where Stern held court were two men, who work for a company called Cosmetic Car Care, flitting around a silver sedan. The commissioner's portentous words had just floated through the tunnel, but the men were obviously unaffected as they rubbed the car with pink feather dusters, preparing for the extravaganza to come.

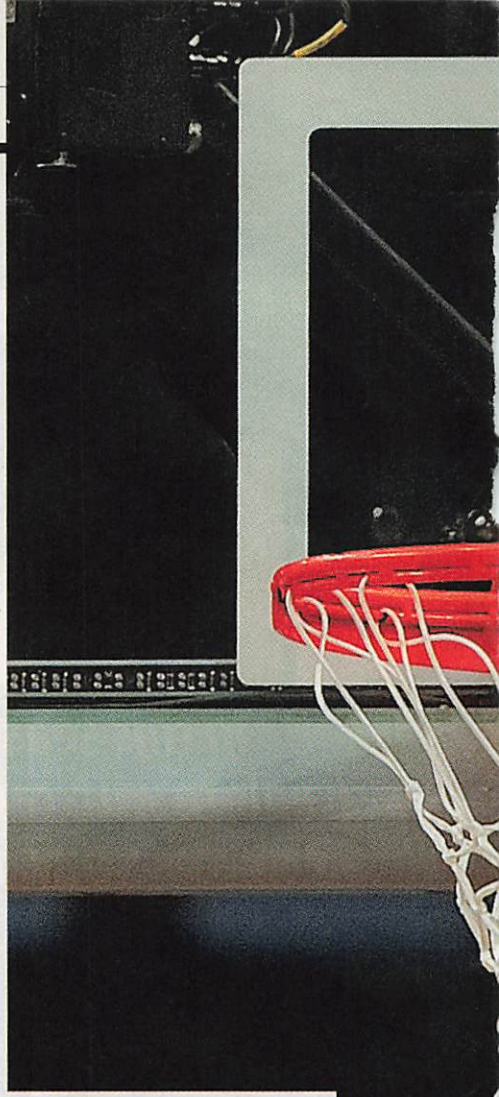
The slam dunk contest was conceived 35 years ago as an entertaining interlude to the regular season, and never has the event served its oh-my-God-did-you-see-that? purpose at a better time. Just as All-Star weekend was about to be hijacked by reports of the Kings fleeing to Orange County, Carmelo Anthony lighting out for New Jersey (or New York or Houston) and the league taking one step closer to a lockout, a flock of young leapers flew in and offered a sideshow for the ages.

They arrived with more props than a magic troupe. The Wizards' JaVale McGee brought his mother, former WNBA star Pam McGee, who was flanked by four bodyguards in suits and sunglasses when she presented him with a shiny black case containing a multicolored ball. The Thunder's Serge Ibaka brought a young boy who ran out of the stands claiming to have lost his stuffed animal on the rim. The Raptors' DeMar DeRozan brought Sir Slam himself, Darryl Dawkins, to read the names of his dunks off posterboards carried by a slender blonde. And the Clippers' Blake Griffin, facing expectations so high he'd have to jump over a car to meet them, brought the glossy silver ride—a 2011 Kia Optima, 72 inches wide, though not nearly as tall as the power forwards Griffin has scaled this season.

The contest has provided some must-save snapshots in recent years—Jason Richardson going between his legs, Dwight Howard levitating in his Superman cape, Nate Robinson hurdling Howard—but like the NBA itself, the competition was doomed by constant and unforgiving comparisons to the '80s. The dunks that looked so fresh and balletic when Michael Jordan and Dominique Wilkins were doing them became dull and predictable. The performers were partly to blame (Chris Andersen needed 15 attempts to escape the first round in 2005), but fans also grew numb to acrobatics they used to find unfathomable.

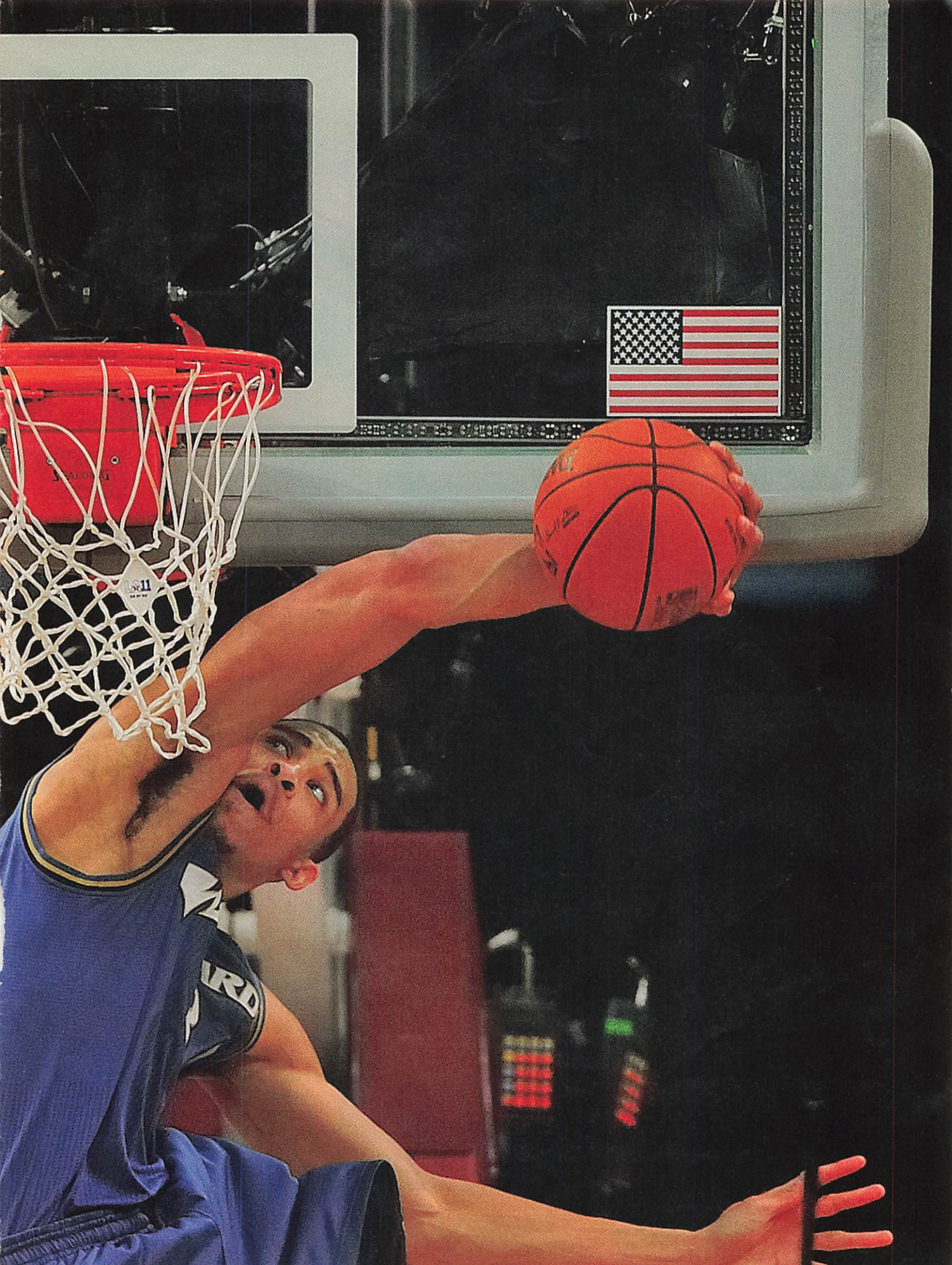
Then came this season of slam, led by Griffin and his 137 dunks, and it only figured the contest would reach new altitudes. A record 8.1 million viewers tuned in, up 49% from last year, and while the audience came for Griffin, they stayed for choreography that the Globetrotters would have found outrageous. In what is traditionally a little man's event—or at least a swingman's—the 7-foot McGee, 6' 10" Ibaka and 6' 10" Griffin were as spidery as Spud Webb.

McGee dunked two balls into separate hoops and then three balls into the same basket. Ibaka dunked after taking off from



ROBERT BECK (RIGHT); JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (INSET SEQUENCE)

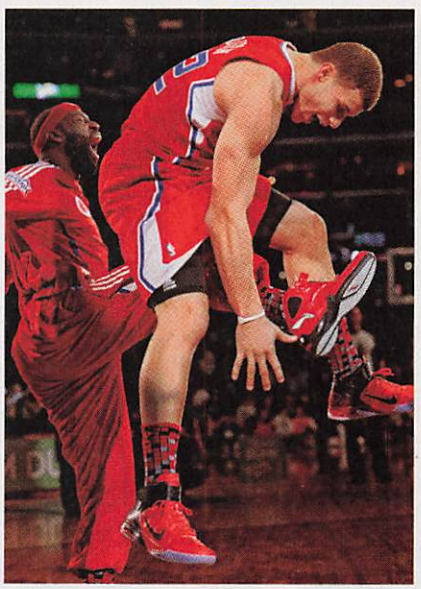
SOAR LOSER Seven-foot jumping jack McGee dunked on two rims and flushed three balls at once to reach the finals, where not even a stunning reverse cuff job from under the backboard could get him the crown.



behind the free throw line and later dunked after snatching the lost stuffed animal from the rim with his teeth. But Griffin had the home court advantage and the hidden horsepower. For McGee, Ibaka and DeRozan the dunk contest was to be a coming-out party. For Griffin it was to be a coronation, a chance to show what he could do without anybody standing under the rim. Never has a Clipper been such a prohibitive favorite in anything.

Griffin has long been fascinated by vehicular obstacles, so much so that after he watched Vince Carter win the 2000 dunk contest, he parked his bicycle underneath the hoop outside his house to jump over it. He would graduate from two wheels to four.

With the Kia parked in the paint, point guard Baron Davis in the driver's seat and the Crenshaw Elite Choir singing *I Believe I*



HIGH-JINKS
Griffin announced his intentions with a corkscrew 360 for his first slam, then celebrated by kicking it up with teammate (and oop tosser) Davis.

JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

PHOTO COMPOSITE BY JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

Can Fly in their robes at center court, Griffin took a lob from Davis through the sunroof, soared for the two-handed dunk, swung on the rim and alit on the hood. All of his ligaments survived intact, though his employers may have incurred some heart palpitations. The Clippers have lost star players, including Griffin, in endeavors far less risky.

"Nothing's going to beat the car unless I bring a plane," McGee said afterward, sounding rueful. Such is the evolution of the dunk contest. Players admit they have run out of new ways to spin and contort and corkscrew their airborne bodies. They can't impress anybody by simply putting a ball behind their head or between their legs. They need to simultaneously be suspended over a circus animal. "It's a different kind of creativity now," says Wilkins, a two-time dunk-contest champion. "But it's still great because of the production and the theatrics."

The jaded will always diminish the dunk contest, its gimmicks and contrivances. Professional sports are serious, and this is one small part that remains hopelessly silly. For one night labor issues and trade demands are overshadowed by trick shots and over-the-top props. The minute it ends, attention shifts back to the bottom-line business of winning—and collective bargaining.

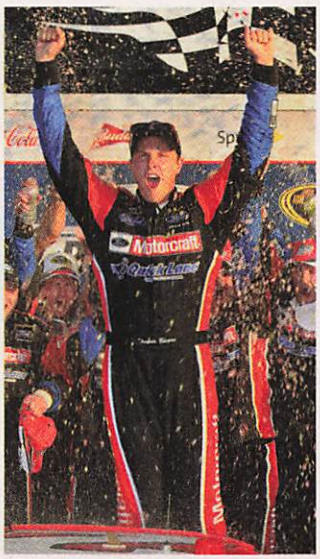
Whether the dunk contest becomes relevant again or simply enjoyed a brief renaissance depends largely on Griffin and whether he continues to participate. He may not be able to resist. "I have to come up with something else," he said. "Maybe a boat." □

NASCAR

THE KID WINS A WILD ONE

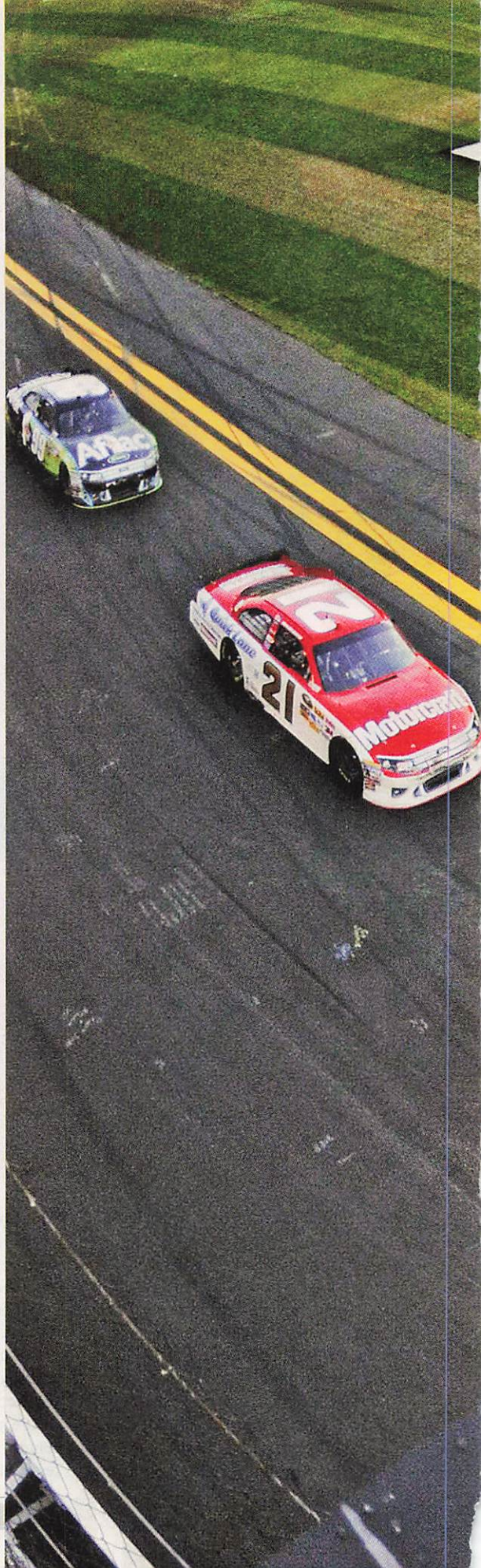
In just his second Cup start, on the day after he turned 20, Trevor Bayne survived a wreck-filled race and outran his elders to become the youngest Daytona 500 winner in history

By Lars Anderson



BRIAN CZOBAT/AUTOSTOCK

Photograph by
CHRIS GRAYTHEN/
REUTERS/POOL



21'S THE ONE Cool beyond his years, Bayne brought his Wood Brothers Ford home ahead of a charging Edwards (right), then revved it up in Victory Lane.

The start of the 53rd running of the Daytona 500 was moments away, and 20-year-old Trevor Bayne was leaning against his number 21 Ford. Unlike nearly every other driver on the starting grid, Bayne had no swarm of photographers, cameramen or fans buzzing around him, and he took a moment to soak in the scene, amazed at how far he'd come in such a short time. Then his father, Rocky, who bought his son his first go-kart when Trevor was five, leaned in close. "I love you," he said. "Just race like you have since you were a boy and you'll do fine. Go get 'em."

And so Bayne did. In what must be considered the greatest upset in the history of the

SUNOCO
OFFICIAL

Great American Race, Bayne, who celebrated his birthday the day before the race by riding a golf cart through the Daytona infield and watching his friends take the checkered flag in a wheelbarrow race, held off a hard-charging Carl Edwards to become the youngest driver to win NASCAR's most prestigious event. How improbable was this victory? His team, Wood Brothers Racing, competed in only 13 Sprint Cup events last season and didn't have a single top 10 finish. Bayne, whose bio isn't even in the NASCAR Sprint Cup media guide, had made just one career start on the Cup circuit—finishing 17th at Texas Motor Speedway last November—and he was so confident that he wouldn't be going on the jet-setting champion's tour the day after the 500 that he drove his own car to Daytona from his home in Mooresville, N.C. "Winning never really entered my mind," Bayne said late on Sunday evening. "But we just hung around, and then all of a sudden I'm leading the race on the last lap. It was a game of survival out there."

Winning the 500 has always required the skill—and luck—to avoid the multicar accidents that frequently erupt on the 2.5-mile superspeedway, but this year's race was the most treacherous in recent memory. Twelve wrecks contributed to a record 16 caution flags. On the week that marked the 10th anniversary of Dale Earnhardt's death at Daytona, no driver was injured. But many looked shaken afterward by the level of danger that existed on the track. A new surface, combined with a new style of two-car drafting (as opposed to the traditional style that saw the cars running in large packs), made the drivers feel like a ticking time bomb was riding shotgun with them.

"That was 520 miles of sheer terror out there," said Edwards, noting that the race was extended eight laps because of crash-induced cautions. "If that were a lesser group of drivers out there, this would have been really, really bad. The circumstances we were all put in made it very, very easy to wreck."

It was an embarrassment, the equivalent of the ice melting during a gold medal Olympic hockey match. Just past midway in last year's 500 a two-inch-deep, nine-by-15-inch hole developed in the track off Turn 2. The pothole delayed NASCAR's most watched event of the season for more than two hours—"An absolute joke," was how Greg Biffle described it—and two months later track officials announced that Daytona would be repaved for the first time since 1978. Starting the day after the Coke Zero 400 last July, teams of up to 100 workers spent five months tearing up the cracked, bumpy surface and laying down 50,000 tons of new asphalt. The $20 million project was a smashing success; the high-banked 2.5-mile tri-oval is now the smoothest track on the Sprint Cup circuit. After Tony Stewart took a few practice laps around the new and improved Daytona, he noted, "You literally could hold a full cup of coffee with the lid off and not spill a drop riding around [the track]."

Yet only one driver fully grasped how the repaving could fundamentally change the nature of racing at Daytona: Kurt Busch. To understand how Busch ushered in a new era at NASCAR's most storied track, you need to go back to a 2007 test session at Talladega (Ala.) Superspeedway, a 2.66-mile tri-oval that like Daytona is a restrictor-plate track. (At these two tracks NASCAR installs restrictor plates on the carburetors to reduce airflow to the engines, which in turn lowers horsepower and keeps speeds from getting out of hand.) Talladega had recently been repaved, and Busch came up with an idea: Let's see how fast I can go around the track when my teammate is pushing me. Busch was blown away by the result. With Ryan Newman's Dodge pushing Busch's from behind at nearly 200 mph, their cars' aerodynamics so improved that the two were more than two seconds faster per lap than when they were running alone.

"That opened our eyes," Busch says. "But we couldn't do it all the way around the track, because we were afraid that we were going to crash through the corners. But we were so fast on the straightaways that we decided that we were going to give it a try in the Daytona 500 the next year."

Five months later Newman and Busch hooked up in a two-car draft over the last three laps of the 2008 Daytona 500. Though they separated in the turns—"It was way too bumpy, and we would have wrecked," Busch says—the teammates shot up through the field over the final 7.5 miles as Busch pushed Newman to Victory Lane.

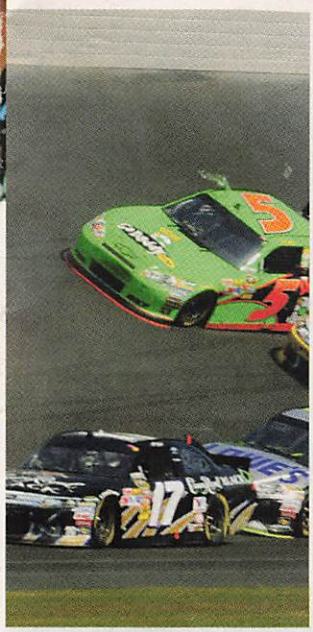
The memory of that experience rushed back at Busch when he arrived at Daytona in December for another test session. Standing in his hauler before heading out onto the repaved track for the first time, Busch told his teammate Brad Keselowski that they should practice the two-car drafting method. Once on the track Busch quickly realized that because the corners were so smooth, the two cars could stay attached all the way around the superspeedway. What's more, they could stay on the throttle for the entire lap, never braking, something drivers couldn't do on the old Daytona track because there wasn't enough "grip" through the corners.

Right away Busch and Keselowski were

FRED VUICH

going almost 15 mph faster than drivers on the track making single car runs. By the end of the test session, nearly every team was following the model of Busch and Keselowski. Not surprisingly Busch, the pioneer of this new kind of racing, dominated Speedweeks. On Feb. 12 he won the Budweiser Shootout, an exhibition race, and five days later he took the checkered flag in his 150-mile qualifying race. On Sunday he led 19 laps before fading late and finishing fifth.

Though they all embraced it, the new style of racing had drivers shaking their heads. "I've never seen anything like this before," said Bill Elliott, who first raced at Daytona in 1976 and would finish 12th on Sunday. "Just like a bunch of kids playing leapfrog but doing it in pairs."



BUMPER CARS With drivers running nose-to-tail (that's Bayne, 21, pushing Jeff Gordon), the racing was faster than ever—but also riskier. The Big One on Lap 29 (left) was just one of 12 wrecks that led to a record 16 yellow flags.

BAYNE'S INEXPERIENCE PROVED TO BE AN ASSET. "THE ONLY THING I KNEW," HE SAID, "WAS TO PUSH, PUSH, PUSH."

The biggest problem with this brand of drafting is that the driver doing the pushing can't see what's ahead on the track. So if a car slows in front of one pair, there often isn't time for the pushing driver to brake, which can lead to major crashes. On Sunday this happened on Lap 29, when Michael Waltrip slammed into the back of David Reutimann, who lost control, triggering the Big One. Twelve cars wound up in the garage, including the number 48 Chevy of five-time reigning Cup champion Jimmie Johnson, who finished 27th.

Bayne, meanwhile, unlike every other driver in the field, was making his first Cup start at Daytona, and he flourished in the two-car draft. His inexperience proved to be an asset. There were no drafting techniques, after all, that he had to unlearn. "I had no preconceived notions going into this," Bayne said. "The only thing I knew was to push, push, push."

On the final restart of the race, with two laps to go, he was in the lead for the first time all day. After the green flag waved, Bobby Labonte, who was directly behind Bayne, hit the rear of the number 21 car, pushing Bayne to a three-car-length lead. Though the race featured a record number of lead changes (74) and leaders (22), Bayne made sure there would be no last-lap pass for the win; he calmly blocked Edwards on the bottom of the track to cruise across the finish line a car length ahead of Edwards's number 99 Ford. Bayne won $1.46 million for taking the checkered flag—his winnings since 2007 had totaled $1.6 million—and the unlikely victory ignited a wild celebration in Bayne's pit. Edsel Ford II, the great grandson of Henry Ford, bear-hugged Len Wood, a co-owner of Wood Brothers. Racing in the Cup series since 1953, the Wood Brothers are the oldest team in NASCAR. But their glory days were in the 1970s, long before Bayne was born, when driver David Pearson was winning nearly every week, and until Sunday they hadn't reached the winner's circle since 2001. This is why dozens of drivers and owners, from Mark Martin to Richard Petty to Kurt Busch, visited the team in Victory Lane, congratulating them on authoring the sport's best feel-good story in years.

Bayne's path to the Cup circuit was a relatively short one. His first motorized vehicle was a mini motorcycle with training wheels, which he started riding around his Knoxville, Tenn., neighborhood at the age of three. Before he was a teenager, he'd won three karting world championships and racked up more than 300 wins. At 13 he moved to the Allison Legacy Series, a backwater stock car circuit. With his dad, who owns a floor-care company, acting as his crew chief, Bayne took 14 checkered flags in 21 starts in his second season, in 2005, winning the series title that year.

At 15 he moved with his dad to Charlotte—the hub of NASCAR—to try to catch the attention of a top team. Soon, he was staying there on his own for periods, working on his GED online and speaking with his father and mother, Stephanie, several times a day. He raced in the NASCAR Camping World East Series and eventually was signed by Roush Fenway Racing late in 2010 to run full time this season in the Nationwide Series, the Triple A of NASCAR. Owner Jack Roush supplies engines and chassis to the Wood Brothers, and when co-owner Glen Wood asked Roush who he thought should drive for his team in this year's 500, Roush immediately volunteered Bayne.

"Trevor excels at diagnosing problems in the car and telling his crew chief exactly what changes need to be made during pit stops," says Len Wood. "He's only 20, but he's got the mind of a longtime veteran."

In an odd twist, Bayne isn't even eligible to win the Cup title this year. In the off-season NASCAR announced that a driver could compete for a championship in only one series in 2011, and Bayne picked Nationwide over Cup. He's planning on running in only 18 Cup races this season, but after Sunday's life-altering victory, that could change if an influx of sponsorship money arrives at the Wood Brothers race shop. Bayne's plan is to race full time in the Cup series in 2012.

"I hope the other drivers don't look down at me as being some young punk who comes in here and wins in just his second start," said Bayne late on Sunday, in Victory Lane. "This is just the beginning for me. Hopefully I'll keep proving that I belong here."

Minutes later Bayne walked off into the night, heading into a future that suddenly is filled with more promise than that of any other young racer in America. That happens when, at age 20, you pull off the most shocking win in the history of the Daytona 500.□

FRED VUICH

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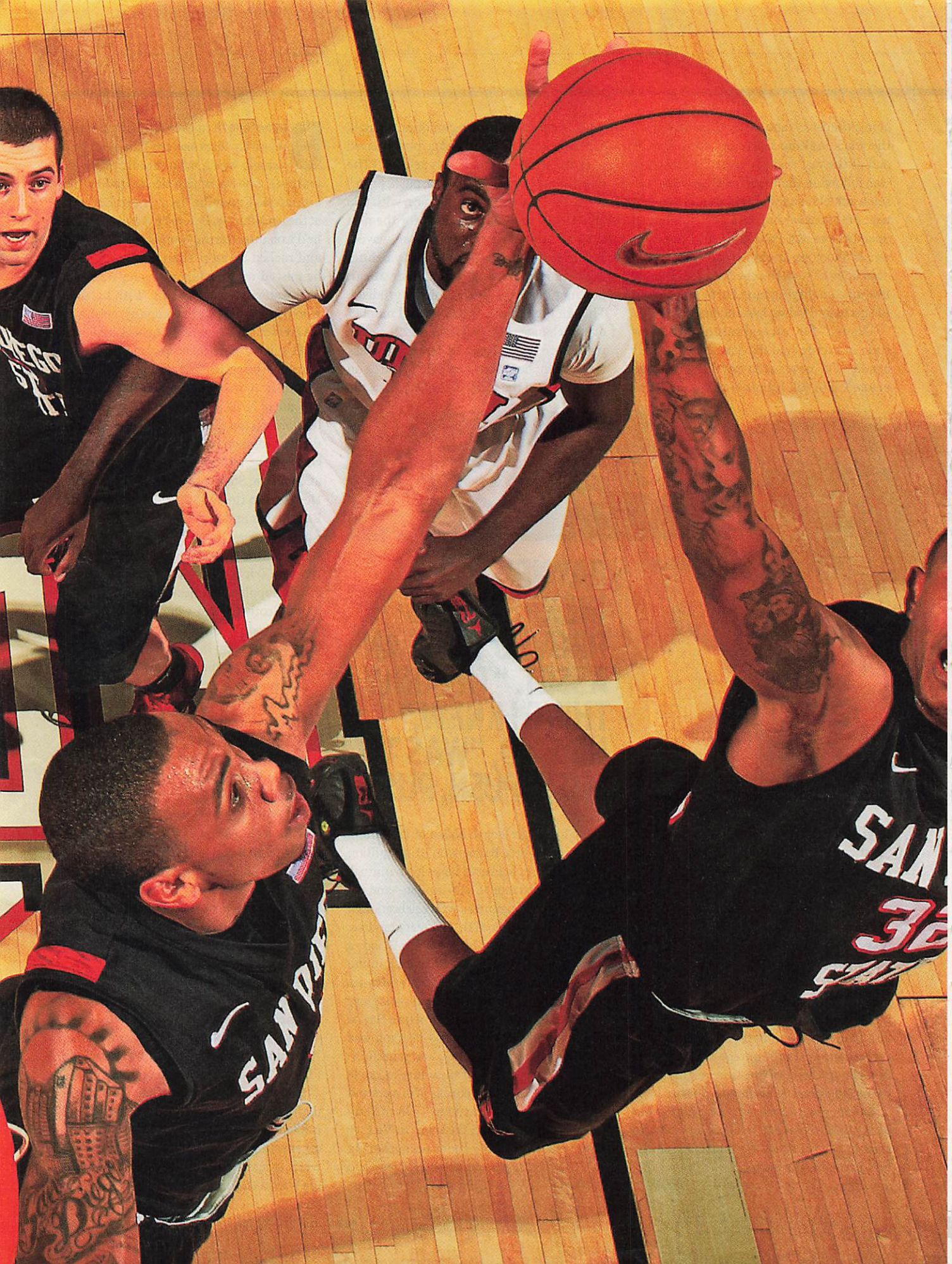
For Lars Anderson's previews and analysis of each Cup race, go to SI.com/racing



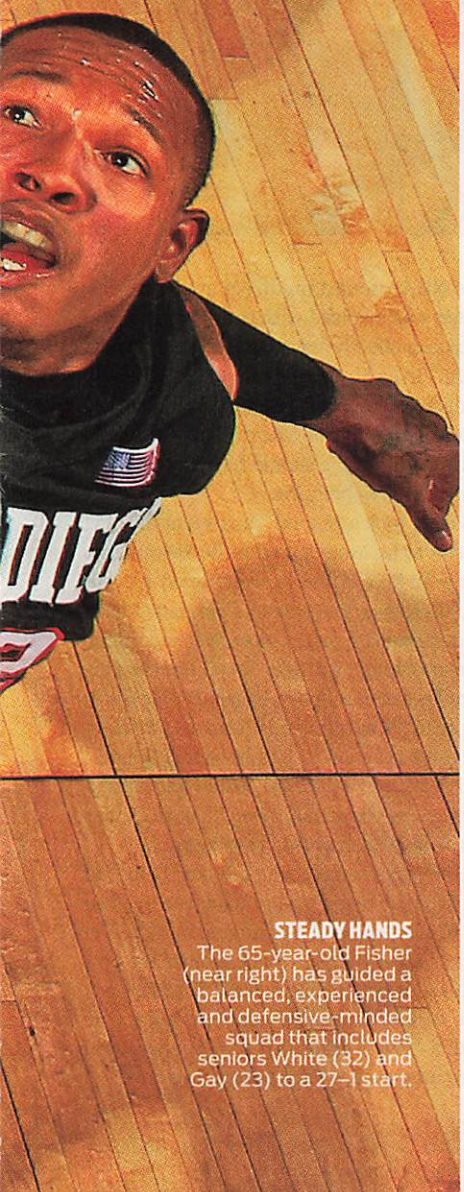
COLLEGE BASKETBALL

MADNESS ON THE MESA

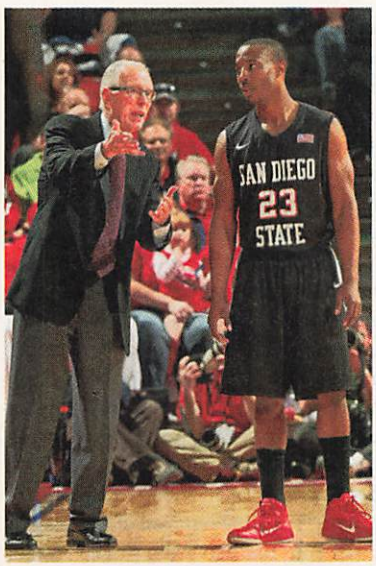
The unprecedented success of sixth-ranked San Diego State has whipped the once-feeble fan base into a frenzy. And it's not even March yet

By Kelli Anderson

Photographs by
JOHN W. McDONOUGH



STEADY HANDS
The 65-year-old Fisher (near right) has guided a balanced, experienced and defensive-minded squad that includes seniors White (32) and Gay (23) to a 27–1 start.



San Diego State senior point guard D.J. Gay can't decide which was more surprising: being hugged by a stranger in the parking lot of a Red Robin in Torrey Pines in December—"You're having a great season," the man gushed. "I'm cheering for you!"—or being chased down by a professor on campus a few weeks ago. After breathlessly shaking Gay's hand, the prof sighed and said, "Now I can tell my husband I've met you!"

It's not just the starters for the sixth-ranked, 27–1 Aztecs who are getting the hero treatment from suddenly hoops-mad San Diegans. When 6' 11" senior reserve center Brian Carlwell walked into the State Street Grill on campus to grab a bite after scoring 10 points in an 85–53 blowout of Utah on Feb. 8, diners put down their forks and gave him a standing ovation. "You wouldn't believe some of the crazy things that have happened this season," says Carlwell.

Consider one December afternoon game at the Aztecs' home, Viejas Arena, atop Montezuma Mesa. The 12,414 seats were sold out; the student section was rocking. Not all that unusual, perhaps, for a team enjoying its first-ever climb up the national polls. Except it was New Year's Eve. The students were in the middle of winter break. And the opponent was Division III Occidental College. "That really tells you what's going on here," says longtime Aztecs radio play-by-play announcer Ted Leitner. "That would never have happened in the past."

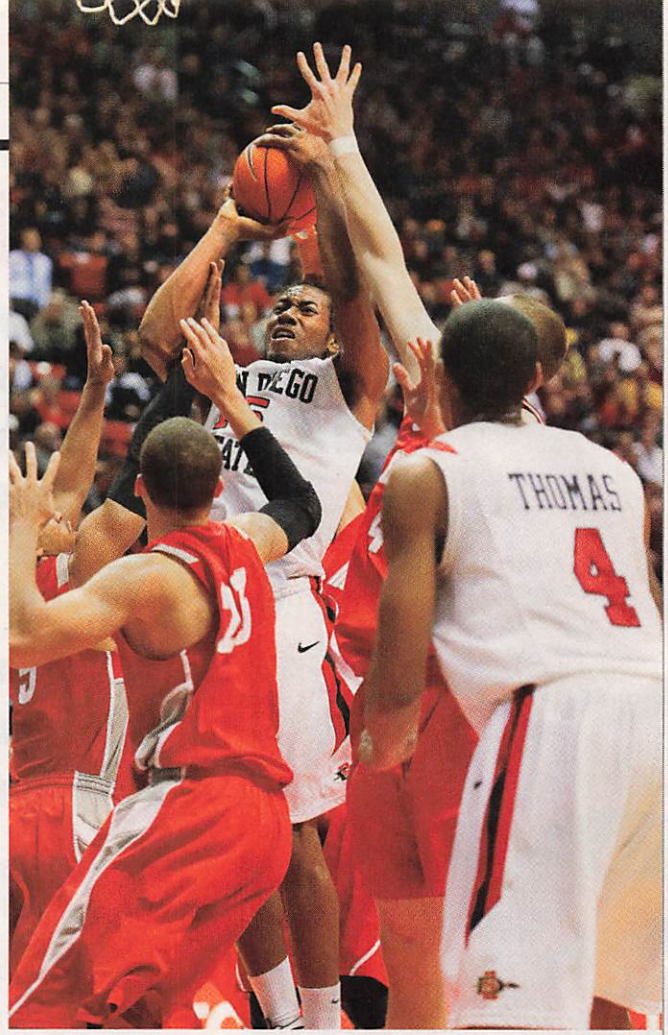
Of course, no San Diego State team of the past combined a rock-solid backcourt (led by team captain Gay) with a well-balanced offense (six players have led the team in scoring) and a man-to-man defense that's one of the stingiest in the country (the Aztecs were allowing 58.6 points per game through Sunday, seventh fewest in the nation). Most notably, the team has a terrific front line

anchored by likely NBA first-rounder Kawhi (kuh-WHY) Leonard, a 6' 7", 225-pound sophomore with such freakishly long arms and huge hands that his teammates have nicknamed him the Human Avatar. "He's the best rebounder I've ever seen," says San Diego State coach Steve Fisher of Leonard, who at week's end was averaging 10.7 boards along with 15.2 points. "He has hands that are so big and strong that if he touches the ball, he's going to get it."

Led by Leonard, the Aztecs are in the Top 25 for the first time ever, they are one 43-point explosion by BYU guard Jimmer Fredette from being unbeaten through mid-February, and they are positioned for their first single-digit NCAA seed, which could be as high as a No. 1 *(page 58)*. That could well lead to their first March Madness victory, though few hoopheads expect the school's run to end at one. Already some are throwing around the ultimate mid-major comparison: Butler—only with a longer and more athletic front line.

San Diego State has sold out 13 games at Viejas, compared with *eight* in the previous 13 years. The students have camped out to claim their one allotted free ticket—even for games against lowly Mountain West foes TCU and Wyoming. When No. 7 BYU comes to town for a nationally televised game on Saturday, the line will again form the night before. Those who get one of the precious 2,500 ducats become part of the Show, which is rapidly eclipsing all student sections in volume and randomness. At the appropriate time, several dozen students in the front rows along one baseline—their costumed numbers usually include a banana, an elf, a gecko and what appears to be an escapee from the '80s band Devo—hold up giant cutout heads of the likes of David Hasselhoff, Justin Bieber, Woody from *Toy Story*, Miley Cyrus and assorted others (is that Kim Jong-il?) with the goal of distracting a free throw shooting opponent with B-list celebrity overload. Did we mention that they are also really, really loud? A well-traveled ref working a recent Aztecs home game told the coaching staff that the only arena environment that compares with San Diego State's right now is Kansas's.

The man behind all the Mesa madness is Fisher, the professorial, 65-year-old Midwesterner who was last in the national spotlight in 1997, at the end of a storied run at Michigan that included the 1989 NCAA title and Final Four appearances in '92 and '93 with the Fab Five class of Chris Webber, Juwan Howard, Jalen Rose, Jimmy King and Ray Jackson.



LEAPIN' LEONARD! The sophomore—a first-round NBA prospect whom Fisher calls the best rebounder he's ever seen—averages a double double.

LEONARD HAS SUCH FREAKISHLY LONG ARMS AND HUGE HANDS THAT HIS TEAMMATES HAVE NICKNAMED HIM THE HUMAN AVATAR.

Fisher's tenure in Ann Arbor had started unexpectedly on the eve of the '89 NCAA tournament, when he was named the interim replacement for Bill Frieder, who was ousted after accepting the Arizona State job. It ended just as abruptly in October 1997, when he was fired in the midst of the school's investigation into booster Ed Martin's relationship with Wolverines players. Martin told a subsequent federal probe that he had given a total of $616,000 to four of Fisher's players, with $280,000 going to Webber. (Webber denied receiving the money, but in July 2003 he pleaded guilty to criminal contempt charges, admitting that he lied to a Detroit grand jury about repaying a $38,200 loan to Martin.) NCAA sanctions handed down in '03 included the forfeiture of 113 games and the removal of the '92 and '93 Final Four banners from Crisler Arena. The NCAA found no direct evidence that Fisher was involved with the payments, and he has steadfastly denied that he was aware of them. Firing him, he says now, "was the easy thing to do. There was enough there that [the administration] could justify saying, Even if he didn't know, he should have known. The irony is that nobody knew."

Fisher took a year off, then spent the next season as an assistant with the Sacramento Kings. In March 1999 he was offered a seven-year deal at San Diego State, a program of such modest tradition that its most celebrated alum, former point guard Tony Gwynn, earned his fame in another sport, baseball. (He's still the school's alltime assist leader.) Of the 14 previous seasons 13 had been losing ones, and two-year-old Viejas Arena had drawn average crowds of only 3,700. "The place was a basketball graveyard," says Leitner.

One of the people who advised Fisher to take the job was Frieder, who was by then out of coaching and planning to move to Del Mar. "I knew that Steve would make the program a lot better than it was," says Frieder, who is now an analyst for Westwood One Radio. "But I don't think anybody could have imagined what's happening now."

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As his first team struggled through a 5–23 season during which home crowds dwindled to 2,600, Fisher spoke at scores of functions, from coffee klatches to Rotary Club gatherings. He walked around campus giving away tickets. He got to know Southern California high school and AAU coaches, and he sold what he had to recruits: nice weather, nice arena, his NCAA title, the Fab Five and playing time.

"We were everywhere," says Fisher. "We made home visits with guys like Tyson Chandler [a standout in Compton, Calif., who went straight to the NBA out of Dominguez High]. The Fab Five got us in front of the uncles and fathers."

Fisher's first two classes yielded a handful of credibility-building recruits, including junior college transfer Randy Holcomb, a Chicago native who is the only Fisher-coached Aztec to play in the NBA; Tony Bland, an L.A.-area high school All-America who transferred from Syracuse; and Chris Walton, the youngest son of San Diego's most famous hoopster, Bill. The Aztecs made the NCAA tournament in Fisher's third year, in 2002, but it would be four years until their next appearance and four *more* years before he assembled a breakthrough squad.

In many respects, this year's team, which has eight holdovers from a season that included 25 wins and a near upset of Tennessee in the first round of the NCAAs, is like most of Fisher's: It's composed of a few junior college and D-I transfers as well as a core of four-year players who were overlooked by bigger programs. All but three players are Californians. But having a future pro in their ranks—and a humble, team-oriented one, at that—represents a significant upgrade.

Leonard, from Riverside, Calif., didn't start playing high school or AAU ball until 10th grade at Canyon Springs High. He had played in youth leagues as a kid but gave up basketball in middle school to focus on football, the sport his father, Mark, loved. Kawhi lived with his mother, Kim Robertson, a sales agent for Amtrak, but he spent a lot of time with his dad, who owned a car wash in Compton, an hour away. He credits both his parents for helping him succeed. But it was Mark, who was murdered three years ago in a case that remains unsolved, who reinforced the idea that extra work was the key to improvement. "We ran hills together, we worked on speed, cutting, doing the little things that helped me get better," says Kawhi. "My dad still motivates me today."

After transferring to King High for his junior year, Leonard led the Wolves to the Southern California Regional Division I semifinals at Taft High in L.A., which is where Aztecs assistant Justin Hutson first saw Leonard play. Hutson was struck most by Leonard's versatility and toughness. "He shot the ball from deep, handled the ball, made nice

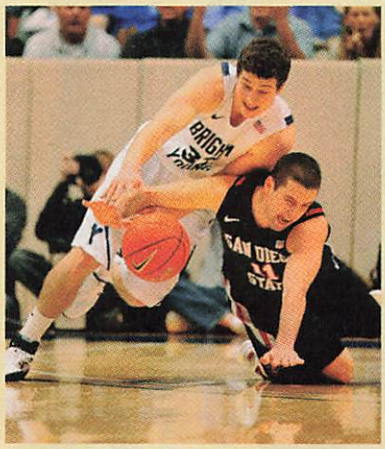
HOW THE MOUNTAIN WEST WILL BE WON

When the Aztecs host rival BYU on Saturday, they can do much more than avenge their only loss of the season. The conference title and a potential No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament will be on the line

Last year's Selection Sunday was a heady moment for the Mountain West Conference, which landed an alltime-best four NCAA tournament bids, including a No. 3 seed for New Mexico, the league's regular-season champion. Six days later, by the end of second-round play, all four teams had been sent home.

As disappointing as those exits were, a similar run of hasty departures this March will cause far more anguish across the conference. At week's end BYU and San Diego State were a combined 52–3 while ranking second and third, respectively, in the RPI. The Cougars and the Aztecs have been so good—and the offensive eruptions by BYU guard Jimmer Fredette so spectacular—that they have turned another possible four-bid Mountain West season (Colorado State and UNLV are in the mix for at-large spots) into a mere footnote. In fact, the MWC is poised to make history. Since the NCAA began seeding tournament teams in 1979, two members of the same nonpower conference have never received No. 2 seeds in the same year. Mountain West associate commissioner Dan Butterly thinks that's the least this duo deserves.

"They're proving that the Mountain West Conference is on par with anybody in the country," Butterly says. "We believe we deserve a Number 1 seed, if not two Number 1 seeds, depending on what happens coming down the stretch."



JIMMERED
Fredette (32) prevailed at BYU, but if James Rahon and the Aztecs win the rematch in San Diego, they could reach unprecedented heights for the MWC.

With the top four teams—Kansas, Ohio State, Texas and Pitt—all losing last week, it's possible the MWC champ could earn a No. 1 seed, which would be a first for the 12-year-old league. Both the Cougars and the Aztecs will be rated high enough to get their preferred subregional site (BYU in Denver and San Diego State in Tucson), but each team's Final Four hopes could be helped by placement in the West regional in Anaheim, the closest and most favorable location for both schools.

An added wrinkle is a religious restriction at BYU that prohibits the team from playing on Sundays. The West regional's Thursday-Saturday schedule would accommodate the Cougars. Having won the teams' first showdown, BYU may need only one more win over SDSU (either on Saturday in San Diego or in the league tournament) to steal the coveted spot from the Aztecs. But if either team runs the table until Selection Sunday, it will be hard for the committee to keep them off the top line of the bracket, making them the first top-seeded team from a mid-major conference since Memphis in 2008. *—Andy Glockner*

GARRETT W. ELLWOOD

passes, played inside, played a little outside," says Hutson. "He played tough on the defensive end, and he was a man on the boards."

MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE When he's not patrolling the paint, Thomas turns up the already high volume at Viejas.

Some recruiters viewed Leonard as a tweener: He didn't have the perimeter skills to be a small forward, and he wasn't big enough to be a power forward. What recruiters overlooked was his work ethic. "Kawhi is a gym rat," says Fisher. "He's a lot better now than he was as a freshman. And he'll be a lot better five years from now. That attitude and desire is what will allow him to come close to maximizing his talent, and he has a lot of that."

Leonard, the 2010 Mountain West Freshman of the Year, is surrounded by experienced hands, including 6' 9" senior forward Malcolm Thomas, a San Diego native who arrived by way of Pepperdine and San Diego City College and was averaging 11.6 points and 8.2 rebounds through Sunday; do-everything senior forward Billy White, a Las Vegan who earned conference Freshman of the Year honors in 2008; Chase Tapley, a 6' 2" sophomore guard from Sacramento who scores 8.4 points a game; and the sure-handed Gay (his 3.03 assist-to-turnover ratio at week's end ranked eighth in the nation), whom Fisher calls the Aztecs' "most important" player.

"These guys have been around the block," says Fisher. "They are used to stress, they are used to altitude"—six of the Aztecs' conference road games are at elevations between 4,300 and 7,200 feet—"and they are used to winning. I think that's been the most important ingredient, coupled with a genuine liking for one another and a willingness to not get selfish when parents and girlfriends are saying, 'You should be starting; you should be getting more shots.' They remain true to the team."

Gay recognized the unusual bond among the Aztecs after one practice last spring. The players had all agreed to go out to dinner together afterward, but he and forward Tim Shelton were so ravenous, they got food on their own. When their teammates learned that Gay and Shelton had broken ranks, "they all got mad at us," says Gay, chuckling. "So we had a team meeting in the parking lot to talk about it."

The players' natural ease with one another is no doubt boosted by Fisher's offensive open-mindedness, which he calls "freedom within framework," and his even-keeled demeanor. "He has to be the most laid-back coach in America," says Thomas. "No matter what happens, he's not going to lose his cool. I think that really helps us."

With all five starters returning this year, the Aztecs couldn't find many teams willing to play at Viejas, and the athletic department doesn't have the budget to pay more than a few teams to visit. (It also can't afford to charter flights.) So San Diego State played eight nonconference games away from home—the most of any Top 25 team except BYU—and won them all, including a 79–76 thriller over then No. 11 Gonzaga, which had lost just four games out of 81 at the McCarthey Center, and a 77–57 thumping of Cal, the Aztecs' first win on a Pac-10 floor in 28 years.

"When you return everybody from a team that won 25 games, it's harder to schedule games," says assistant Brian Dutcher. "Maybe that's why, in the end, we'll have the kind of year we want to have, because we got tested."

The biggest test still awaits. "I know every program is measured on, Did you win in the tournament?" says Fisher. "If we don't, this will still have been a great year. But if we want the city of San Diego talking about the 2010–11 team 10 years from now, we have to win in the tournament."

It will be a surprise if the Aztecs don't. After they destroyed his team on Feb. 8, Utah coach Jim Boylen called them "a Final Four team."

The thought of that possibility, and the recognition that there are no truly dominant teams this season, momentarily tilts Fisher off-keel. "Why not us?" he asks, sitting in his spacious sun-soaked office. "Really, why not us?"

On Montezuma Mesa, crazier things have already happened. □

STUDENTS IN THE FRONT ROWS HOLD UP GIANT CUTOUT HEADS, HOPING TO DISTRACT OPPOSING FOUL SHOOTERS WITH A B-LIST CELEBRITY OVERLOAD.

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ROBERT BECK (FANS)

SCHOOL COLORS
With a GPA slightly under 4.0, Danton, who has scored just three goals this year, has impressed more people at St. Mary's with his classwork than with his hockey.

"I'M GLAD I WENT TO PRISON"

NEARLY SEVEN YEARS AFTER HE TRIED TO ARRANGE A MURDER, FORMER NHL PLAYER MIKE DANTON IS STUDYING PSYCHOLOGY AND FINALLY PIECING HIS LIFE TOGETHER

By L. Jon Wertheim

Photograph by **DARREN CARROLL**

A water main has burst near St. Mary's University, a small Catholic college a few blocks from downtown Halifax. This happens with some frequency, especially during the harsh Nova Scotia winters, and means that students, faculty and the occasional nun must sidestep puddles as they walk across the tree-lined campus. It also means that once again the gym will lose its supply of hot water, so the skating rink can't be flooded. As a result, the hockey team will have to curtail its afternoon practice.

The news, delivered to the players as they prepare for the session, triggers a machine-gun spray of expletives in the Huskies' dressing room, a cube as cramped as it is malodorous. It is another perceived indignity to the team, the defending Canadian college champs, whose home venue is far shabbier than the other area rinks, including the ones in Cole Harbour where Sidney Crosby developed his extravagant skills. The St. Mary's team could use the ice time. It's winning games this season (the Huskies finished 18-9-1 and earned a bye through the first round of the Canadian Interuniversity playoffs, which began last week) but winning ugly, with lines that still lack synergy.

The oldest player, though, is ambivalent about the session's abrupt end. Mike Danton, a compactly built 5' 9" forward, had hoped that a strong practice would help halt his slump—"For whatever reason I can't find the back of the net," he complains—and boost his conditioning, which slipped while he battled a head cold. Then again, the sooner practice is over, the sooner the 30-year-old Danton can start studying.

So it is that after briefly weaving up and down the soft ice with other members of his "shutdown" line, Danton showers, throws on a hoodie and a HOCKEY BOY ball cap and gathers a backpack so heavy it should be outfitted with a set of wheels. He's off to the Patrick Power Library, where, teammates joke, he spends so much time he should be paying rent. When it closes at 11 p.m. he will walk to the sparse off-campus apartment he shares with a teammate and, with eyes at half-mast, study some more.

Danton, a second-year student, is the Canadian equivalent of an Academic All-America. But that doesn't do justice to his scholastic record. He's taken 11 courses at St. Mary's. His lowest grade is an A–, and his GPA is a hair under 4.0. His course schedule in the previous semester included geography, research methods, social behavior and memory. His grades, respectively: A, A–, A, A+. "If I'd done this 10 years ago, I would have been partying and sliding by with teachers who were hockey fans—youth wasted on the young, you know," he says while sitting on a couch in the lobby of the library. "Now I've established a routine, and I've discovered that I really like the process of learning and thinking critically."

Danton's major is psychology. He's reading Jung, Piaget and Freud—"I think Freud's the one who needed psychoanalysis," he says—studying the mysteries of the human mind. "It's amazing how important the brain is, how it controls so much," he says.

"We do this because of that, that because of this. Just fascinating."

He entered school with vague ambitions of returning to his previous career, that of a grinding forward in the NHL. Although he still would one day like to play professional hockey again, now his long-term goal is to earn a Ph.D. in psychology. His professors say that's no pipe dream. "He's an absolutely outstanding student. He handed in a paper that I can freely say is one of the best I've gotten in my years of teaching," says St. Mary's psychology professor Lucie Kocum, who taught Danton's research methods course. "He has a self-exacting approach, but he brings this exuberance to class."

Is it too simplistic, Danton is asked, to assume that he's enthralled with psychology because of everything he's been through?

"Yeah," he says. "But if I were you, I'd put it in the story anyway. I mean, how can you not?"

Mike Danton recalls clearly the moment he hit rock bottom. In April 2004 the fourth-line center for the St. Louis Blues sat crying on the upper bunk of a Santa Clara (Calif.) County jail cell. He was 23 years old and had been charged with a felony less than two weeks earlier. The internal chaos born from his disjointed and dysfunctional childhood had erupted in spectacular fashion. "And now I'm thinking, I'm f-----, I'm never going to be able to play hockey again. And then it's like, Who's going to give me a chance to be their husband, to get close to their family?"

On a wall opposite his bunk he scrawled the names of people he loved. Then he meticulously tore two-inch-wide strands from a towel he'd been given. He tied them into a noose, wreathed it around his neck and knotted the free end to the top of the bunk. Sobbing, he inhaled and jumped off the bed, figuring it was a better alternative to the bleak future now confronting him. It would be a brutally simple end to a story that had become impossibly complex.

GAME OVER
Danton last saw action in the NHL during the Blues' first-round loss to the Sharks in the 2004 playoffs (left); the morning after St. Louis was eliminated, police arrested him at the San Jose airport.

TIM PARKER/REUTERS (LEFT); CLINTON COUNTY JAIL/AP (RIGHT)

Danton was born Mike Jefferson and grew up in the Toronto suburb of Brampton, the son of Steve and Sue Jefferson, who made their living operating a coffee concession at construction sites. Mike wasn't big, but he was a hell of a young hockey player, a rugged, energetic mucker who seemed to know where the puck was going before anyone else on the ice. From the time he was 11, Danton's junior coach was David Frost.

Even before Mike's abundant talent was apparent, he had decided to devote his life to hockey. It was less what he did than who he was. The speed and the hitting were intoxicating, and he took particular pleasure in outskating (and later, outfighting) bigger opponents. Besides, he says, it beat being at home. Since his arrest Mike has repeatedly claimed that he was physically and emotionally abused, though there is no record he ever made such allegations before. It's a charge his parents have always vigorously denied, as they did to SI last week. By his early teen years Mike had left home and moved in with Frost and his wife, Bridget. He considered the couple to be his surrogate parents.

Frost's junior teams—led by Mike Jefferson; a second future NHL forward, Sheldon Keefe; and Joe Goodenow, son of former NHL Players' Association head Bob Goodenow—were cocky and combative, a reflection of their coach. In 1997, Frost pleaded guilty to a charge of hitting one of his own players. After a 2004 altercation between Frost and a Central A Junior Hockey League official at a game in Ottawa, the league's commissioner banned Frost and reportedly distributed his photo to arena personnel.

Frost, though, inspired fierce loyalty and closeness among his players, particularly Mike Jefferson, who sat with his coach on bus rides and communicated with him on the ice through an elaborate system of hand gestures. In the 2005 documentary *Rogue Agent*, aired by the Canadian Broadcasting Company, Frost is depicted as a manipulative Svengali who held his team's star under a spell. Sue Jefferson has claimed that Frost was so controlling he would permit her to see her son only for an hour on Christmas. Steve Jefferson later told the Toronto *Globe and Mail* that Frost "stole Michael from us, [and has taken] Michael's mind from him."

Apart from maintaining what some felt was an inappropriate closeness with Mike Jefferson, Frost was accused of hosting alcohol-fueled sex parties at a motel in Deseronto, Ont. In a criminal case brought in 2006, he was charged with multiple counts of sexual exploitation stemming from several parties that occurred in 1996–97 while Danton was a member of the Junior A Quinte Hawks. According to the allegations, Frost encouraged, and then watched, sexual acts between his players and girls under the age of 17. (He was acquitted of all charges in 2008, in part because two of the former players appeared as witnesses for the defense and denied that any sexual exploitation had ever occurred.)

For all the dissonance in his life, Mike's hockey career was a steady progression of success. In May 2000 he led the Barrie (Ont.) Colts to the finals of the Memorial Cup, Canada's junior-hockey club championship. The Devils drafted him in the fifth round one month later. His agent of record: David Frost. It was around that time that Jefferson formally changed his surname to Danton—the name of a former teammate that Mike thought sounded "cool"—a further attempt to disassociate himself from his family. He reported to the Albany (N.Y.) River Rats of the AHL and kept climbing hockey's org chart.

By the '02–03 season Danton was in the NHL, making more than $500,000. In June '03 he was traded to the Blues, one of the league's class organizations. "He had a smallish build, but he was strong, he had some speed, good hands, and we knew he'd battle," recalls Larry Pleau, then the general manager in St. Louis. "We knew there was some baggage—there were rumors about his agent—but we were happy to have him."

On the ice and in the dressing room Danton was fine. When

he left the arena he was often miserable. "I had a big problem with being alone," he says. "I had no one I could count on and who cared for me the way I wanted them to." His solution was to avoid sleep. He'd go to strip clubs, drink immodestly, take up female companionship and stay up until sunrise. He'd crash for a few hours and maybe steal a nap in the afternoon.

According to the complaint filed in the Southern District of Illinois on April 16, 2004, a figure later identified as an "individual from Canada" was, according to Danton, coming to St. Louis to murder him over money owed. Danton tried to have the man killed. On two separate occasions he offered $10,000 for the murder of the "individual from Canada," and asked that the crime be made to look like a botched robbery. An East St. Louis strip-club bouncer declined his offer; Danton next used an intermediary to approach another man about the job. The potential hit man, however, was Justin Levi Jones, a 19-year-old police dispatcher from Columbia, Ill., who promptly notified the FBI.

On April 16, the night the Sharks eliminated St. Louis from the '04 Stanley Cup playoffs, Danton was arrested by FBI agents at the San Jose airport, charged with what police documents termed a "murder-for-hire" plot. The person prosecutors contend he was accused of scheming to have killed? David Frost, who was then staying in Danton's apartment. (In the CBC documentary both men who were approached to carry out the killing confirmed Frost was the target.) "We were all just shocked," says Pleau. "I mean, shocked."

Danton refused to provide a motive or admit he was targeting Frost. (In 2009 he would tell Canada's national parole board that he was trying to murder his father, who he believed was trying to kill him.) But authorities released to the media a series of collect calls Danton made to Frost in the days after his arrest. In one, Frost told Danton to say that years of abuse by his parents had led him to commit the crime; in another Frost asked if there was any reason he should still fear for his safety—to which Danton replied no. When Frost pressed his protégé to explain why he wanted him dead, Danton rambled incoherently. "I don't know," he said. "Everything the same. I was just, I didn't know. I was just . . . obviously everything started coming down at the same time."

The most dramatic exchange came at the end of a call shortly after Danton was taken into custody.

"Do you love me?" Frost asked in a gravelly tone.

"Yes," Danton replied meekly.

"Say it."

"I love you."

"Do you?"

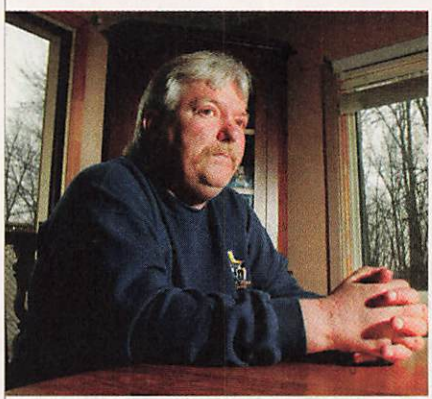
"Yeah."

Danton entered a plea agreement with the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois in which he admitted to trying to arrange a murder and was sentenced to 90 months in federal prison. (*The Denver Post* would later reveal that the lawyer representing Danton was a convicted felon and never licensed to practice.) Even the judge felt compelled to remark at Danton's sentencing, "In over 18 years on the bench I have [never] been faced with a case as bizarre as this one."

When Danton jumped off that jailhouse bunk bed with a terry-cloth noose around his neck, it was no halfhearted suicide attempt. "I absolutely wanted to die," he says.

But the strands of towel ripped, unable to support his 190 pounds. Danton landed on the ground and stared at the names he'd written on the wall, tears puddling next to him. He took his survival as a sign. "I'm not religious, but I realized that if I was supposed to die that day, I would have," he says. "From that moment on I was like, I have to better myself. I didn't like the person I was, and I had to be someone different."

DANTON TORE TWO-INCH STRANDS FROM A TOWEL, TIED THEM INTO A NOOSE, WREATHED IT AROUND HIS NECK AND KNOTTED THE FREE END TO THE TOP OF HIS BUNK.



BROKEN BONDS Danton (near right, in 2000 when his surname was still Jefferson) claimed he was trying to arrange the murder of his father, Steve Jefferson (left). But authorities said he was targeting Frost (far right), his junior coach, professional agent and, from Danton's perspective, surrogate father.

BERNARD WEIL/TORONTO STAR

The first step was intensive therapy. The NHLPA provided Danton with counseling services. Ron Dicker, a St. Louis–based psychologist, visited regularly when Danton was incarcerated in the Midwest, and assigned him readings and self-improvement exercises. As Danton moved from one federal facility to another, the psychotherapy continued by phone. Says Danton, "I'm simplifying a pretty complex situation, but it came down to this: You can't love others until you love yourself. You can't trust others until you trust yourself. You can't fully respect others until you respect yourself. He got me to understand myself."

It was a painful process, Danton stresses, made all the more difficult by his incarceration. But eventually Danton didn't merely

get to know himself; he grew rather fond of that person. He was transferred frequently among jails—not uncommon in the federal system—and in Fort Dix, N.J., he spent seven months in solitary confinement for, he says, abusing his library privileges. (The prison did not respond to calls seeking comment.) He struggled with being alone. Danton passed the time by reading ("everything from James Patterson to Fyodor Dostoyevsky") and writing and thinking. He also took correspondence courses through Queen's University in Ontario. He grew frustrated by his inability to ask questions or discuss the material with a professor. A decade after dropping out of school, he embraced learning.

"I know this is going to sound nuts, but I'm glad I went to prison," Danton says. "I don't like the length of time I went there for. But I'm fortunate for the opportunity, because the negative-slash-downward spiral that would have happened would have been 10 times worse. It saved me in a way."

Danton spent his last few months of confinement in a Canadian jail, thanks to the country's transfer treaty with the United States.

FROM LEFT: DOUG CRAWFORD/BARRIE EXAMINER/CP; MIKE CARROCCETTO/ZUMA PRESS

Canadian authorities reduced his sentence to 65 months. As his release date neared in the fall of '09, he pondered his future. He was broke, lap dances and then legal fees having consumed his NHL money. He dreamed of returning to the league, but he hadn't skated in more than five years. Danton had nowhere to go. He was still estranged from his biological family—who recently announced a deal with Penguin to publish a book telling their side of the story—and had essentially cut ties with Frost, who, after so much unflattering media attention, had taken an alias and moved to California. (Though his family alleges Frost is still part of his life, Danton declines to elaborate on the record. "Nobody's business," he says.)

Danton did, though, have his newfound self-confidence and his newfound love of learning. His passion for hockey still blazed. And despite having played in the NHL, he was eligible to compete at a Canadian university. So at age 28, fresh off a prison sentence, he set about applying to college.

Trevor Stienburg thought it was a joke. Like most Canadians he had followed Danton's rise and fall. Probably closer than most, in fact. Stienburg had been a first-round pick in the 1984 NHL draft, a dynamic winger with a swift slap shot and a commensurately quick temper. His body, unfortunately, was in a constant state of rebellion, and he played only 71 games over parts of four seasons for the Quebec Nordiques. Otherwise he lived a life out of *Slapshot*, pinballing around the minors. In 1997, three years after hanging up his skates, Stienburg landed the coaching job at St. Mary's. His take on Danton was, *How the hell could he scrap his way to the game's highest level and then, once inside the kingdom, piss away his career?*

Shortly after Stienburg got a letter from Danton in late 2009 expressing interest in joining the Huskies, he gathered his players. "I told them, 'You're never going to believe who wants to play here: Mike friggin' Danton,' " he says. "I laughed and sent them back on the ice."

But many of the players had already spoken to Danton, who had been seeking them out in an effort to learn about the St. Mary's program. The captain at the time, forward Marc Rancourt, drafted a letter to Stienburg, signed by the entire team. It read in part, "We have all made mistakes. Perhaps not to the extent of his, but still serious enough that we had to ask for forgiveness or a second chance. . . . We have a unique opportunity here to provide Mike with a second chance that he has not only earned, but is entitled to."

That echoed the message Stienburg was getting from his father, Malcolm, a prison chaplain and at one time a top-ranking officer on the national parole board. "My dad said, Remember how you were brought up, son," recalls the coach. "He was like, If you take this kid, cover up, because you'll take some shots. But if you don't take him, don't let him rehabilitate, you'll have second thoughts."

Stienburg explained to Danton that if he ever saw Frost in the arena, Danton would be off the team. Danton assured him that that would not happen. "He acknowledged very well that Frost can't be in his life," says Stienburg. "He does have a bit of an issue with the fact that as awful as [Frost] was in so many ways, he still gave the kid an upbringing. But Mike knows David is not good for him. He knows that."

Danton selected St. Mary's (enrollment: 8,500) mostly for hockey. But it didn't hurt that he would be getting away from Ontario—where he felt the Toronto media had often portrayed him unfavorably—and relocating to a more socially progressive Maritime province. Both the player and the coach were prepared for some blowback. Stienburg claims, though, that for every critical call, letter or e-mail he received there were 10 that supported his decision. "People realized he didn't want a handout; he wanted to go back to school," says Stienburg, who soon mounted a sign in his office: IF YOU DON'T LIKE YOUR LIFE, CHANGE IT.

Skepticism ceased last season when Danton scored a goal in

his first game and then helped the Huskies win their first Canadian Interuniversity Sport title. Despite his NHL credentials Danton served only as a defensive stopper. Still, he brought savvy, industriousness and an infusion of energy. "O.K., maybe he's not a 25-goal scorer," says St. Mary's forward Cam Fergus. "Still, if the puck goes into the corner, chances are he's coming out with it." Teammates were surprised by his humility. They once asked Danton how, having flown charter and skated in the big arenas of the NHL, he could abide by the modest conditions of Canadian college hockey. "Trust me," he said, "this is a lot closer to the NHL than it is to jail."

"Dants" was instantly popular in the locker room. He still gets razzed about his age and his absence of hair and even, on occasion, his criminal past; he in turn dispenses grief over his teammates' zits and failings with coeds. Until Jan. 22, Danton was on parole, one provision of which prohibited him from consuming alcohol. At team functions he sipped Red Bull and water while his teammates drank adult beverages. "I missed hockey," he says, "but I also just missed being on a team."

ST. ELSEWHERE
Before arriving in Halifax, Danton (foreground) corresponded with the Huskies, who gave him their support.

He quickly became a familiar face at St. Mary's, and concern over his past dissipated. When Danton goes to the library's atrium, he's greeted near the front desk by a girl wearing a Muslim head scarf and then by a knot of guys in UFC shirts. He organizes study groups. Other students say that the buzz on campus quickly went from, *Pssst, there's Mike Danton*, to, *Hey, what's up, Mike?*

When he talks about his childhood, his crime, even his prison sentence, Danton speaks with a sort of clinical detachment, almost as if describing another person. But he pauses to collect himself when he talks about his classmates and the St. Mary's community. "You hear so much negative about kids today," he says. "These people made a decision to accept me—a convicted felon [who] hired someone to kill another person. Why? Because they got to know me and realized I wasn't a monster. And they did it at age 18 or 19. To me, that's amazing." He pauses and smiles, revealing a gap in his upper bridge. "Look at me, getting all gushy." Another pause. "Acceptance is a warm feeling."

With some clarity of mind and years of detachment what, finally, does he make of his bizarre saga? Conversant as Danton is with the vocabulary, he is reluctant to throw around terms like *suppression* and *repression* and *sublimation*. His more mundane explanation: "I was a dumbass." He believes that his unhappy childhood was a factor. "Do I wish I had more guidance, that things might have gone differently if the first 10 years of my life were different? Yeah."

Ultimately, though, Danton resists playing the victim card. "I was the one who screwed up," he says. "I committed a crime, and I have no problem holding myself accountable. . . . There were a lot of psychological factors, and I just had a breakdown. Looking back, you see all the triggers, all the telltales. If it hadn't been [the murder plot], it would have been something else. I would have tried drugs or tried to kill myself. Yeah, I was messed up."

He tries not to talk about the Frost family, not least because "they have two kids, and they've been put through so much." But there's little doubt to whom he's referring when he says things like, "I couldn't make decisions for myself. I relied on other people. . . . I was a 23-year-old infant who wasn't in the right mind frame to be an adult, much less an NHL player." Danton's take: That someone could have ended up dead speaks volumes about his mental instability.

Danton admits that his first 30 years could be a psychologist's lifework. "It's fascinating to me," he says. "I can understand why it's interesting [to outsiders]." But he's less interested in becoming a therapist and "dealing with darkness" than in working with athletes to help them elevate their performance when it matters most. "As humble as I can make this sound, I've played at the highest level; I made a pretty big mistake that cost me; I have a lot of knowledge of being an underdog and rising to the occasion," he says. "With some more knowledge and training, I think I can help other athletes."

"I COULDN'T MAKE DECISIONS," DANTON SAYS. "I WAS A 23-YEAR-OLD INFANT WHO WASN'T IN THE RIGHT MIND FRAME TO BE AN ADULT, MUCH LESS AN NHL PLAYER."

He balances the hope of again playing high-level professional hockey with the reality. He's more concerned with keeping up his grade point average than his scoring average. Already he's torn between getting an advanced degree after graduation and getting a job. "I don't need much to live on," he says, "but I've basically had no income for seven years."

When he considers his future, he starts shaking his head, staring out the window of the library toward the ocean a few blocks away. "You know what I really want? To have a family, have kids, be a great dad," he says. "Just the usual, normal stuff, you know?" □

DARREN CARROLL

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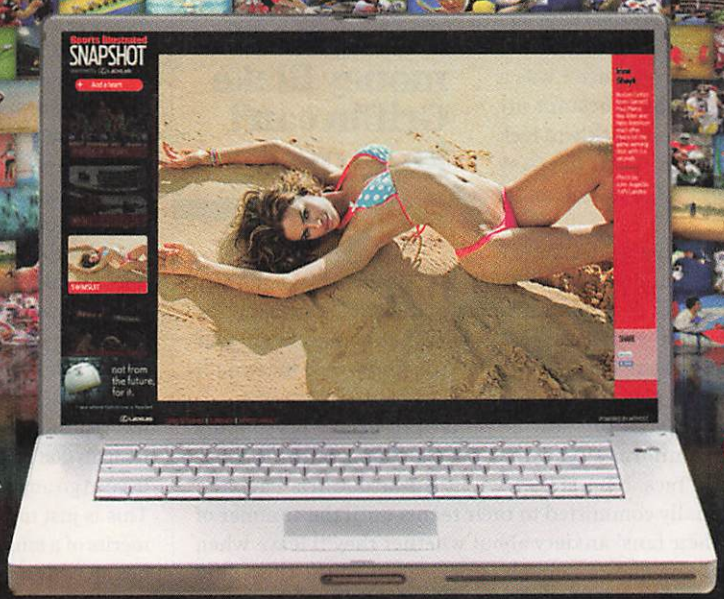

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My Own 'Melo Drama

By PHIL TAYLOR

It hit me last week when I heard Carmelo Anthony trade rumor number 4,932—the one that, if I remember correctly, had the Nuggets asking the Knicks for three starters, two draft picks, salary-cap relief, a pied-à-terre on Central Park West and half of Walt Frazier's wardrobe. I realized then that as career moves go, nothing beats contractual wrangling: You gain a higher profile with each round of speculation and, if you do it right, a pile of money even Blake Griffin can't jump over. So I want to follow the lead of Anthony, Albert Pujols, LeBron James et al. and make my future employment as newsworthy as my current performance. I have decided to become a free agent.

As career moves go, nothing beats contractual wrangling: You get a higher profile with each new rumor and a pile of money Blake Griffin can't jump over.

You've heard of athletes playing out their contracts? I am *writing* out my contract, unless SPORTS ILLUSTRATED signs me to a fat multiyear deal or trades me to another publication. I'm giving my bosses three more issues to make me an acceptable offer. After that, I'm cutting off negotiations, as Pujols has done with the Cardinals, because I don't want this to be a distraction to the other writers. It's not that I want to leave; the editors, reporters and photographers at SI are great teammates, and the readers have supported me ever since I was a rookie. But, hey, I've got to do what's best for my family. Either the magazine moves quickly to lock me up long term, or in a few weeks I call Jim Gray and tell him to book us a Boys & Girls Club and a camera crew.

Why am I announcing this now, when there's plenty of time before I actually put myself on the market? Because this is the way the elite performers play it. Forget championships and individual statistics. The true measure of greatness is whether you can make everyone agonize about your possible departure long before you're eligible to leave. You know they love you if they miss you before you're even gone.

Pujols can't exit St. Louis until after this season, yet the prospect of his slipping into a different major league uniform already has the Cardinals faithful chugging Tums as if they were Tic Tacs. NBA stars Dwight Howard, Chris Paul and Deron Williams are contractually committed to their teams until the summer of 2012, but that hasn't eased their fans' anxiety about whether they'll leave when they get the chance. Of course no one can match James, who had the Cleveland populace fearing his departure a full two years before he actually took his talents to South Beach. No wonder they call him the King.

As for my own future, this will be the last public statement I'll make on the matter. I don't want to negotiate through the press, even though I *am* the press. Speaking of which, I want to alert my colleagues in the media that I will now begin referring to them dismissively as *you guys*, as in, "I don't know where you guys are getting your information" and "The hardest part of this is dealing with all the questions from you guys." Then I will sigh deeply and rub my temples to let them know how stressful it is to keep thinking of cryptic answers. I may take a page from Anthony and "take my hat off to myself" for enduring the aggravation that I created. That's a nice touch.

I will also make sure to maintain my negotiating leverage by having my people leak rumors about my possible plans. (Note to self: Get some "people.") Then, when asked about those rumors, I will pretend to have no knowledge of them. ("My own CNN interview show and a three-book deal with Doubleday? Wow, haven't heard that. You guys know more than I do.") To keep the buzz about me from dying down, I will open a new Twitter account, where I will tweet out my troubles. ("HATE losing my PRIVACY!!! BTW, going to Jay-Z concert 2nite. Row D, Seat 6.")

You may be thinking that the free-agent gambit won't work for me because a sportswriter is far easier to replace than an elite professional athlete. I've considered that myself, which is why I'm hiring Scott Boras as my agent. Boras is famous for coming up with reams of research that make it appear that his client should not only get a huge payday but also have a statue erected in his honor. If he can bamboozle the Mets into giving an inept pitcher like Oliver Perez a three-year, $36 million contract, he can make me look like the second coming of Red Smith.

It may seem that I'm driven by ego and greed, but let's be realistic: This is a business. A writer's prime doesn't last forever. What happens in a few years, when I can't come up with just the right adjective quite as quickly? Or when some young writer with a flair for turning a phrase comes and tries to take my job? I have to use my leverage while I have it.

If I do go to another publication it has to have a shot at a Pulitzer; otherwise I'll play the retirement card like Bengals quarterback Carson Palmer, who has reportedly said he'll hang up his cleats if the Bengals don't deal him. But if my plan works I won't have to go anywhere: I can retire with an SI laptop. This is just my way of helping my bosses see the merits of a long-term deal—provided, of course, it has an early opt-out clause. That way, as soon as I decide to stay, the speculation can begin about when I'll leave. What could be better than that? □

JOHN BURGESS

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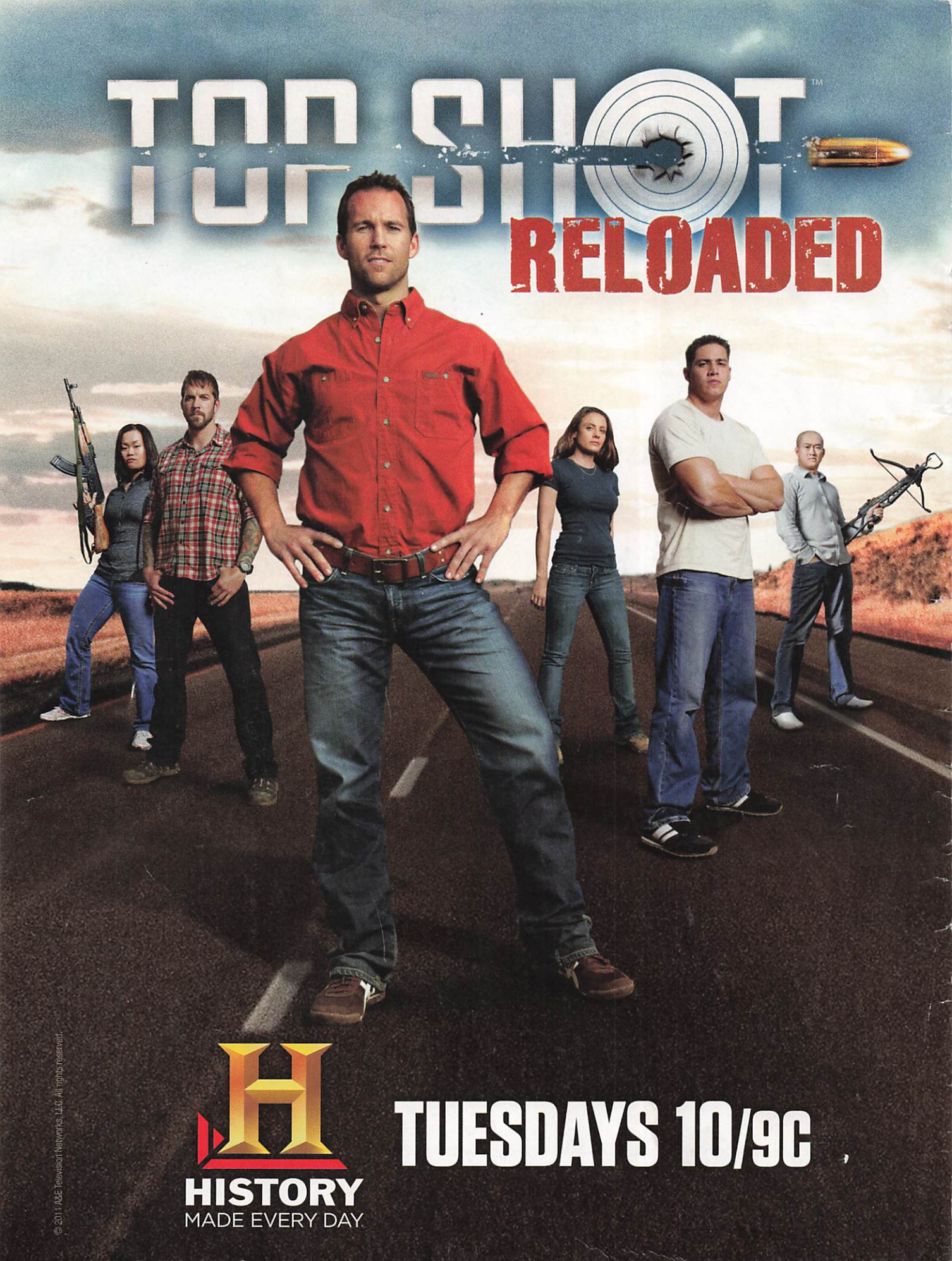
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